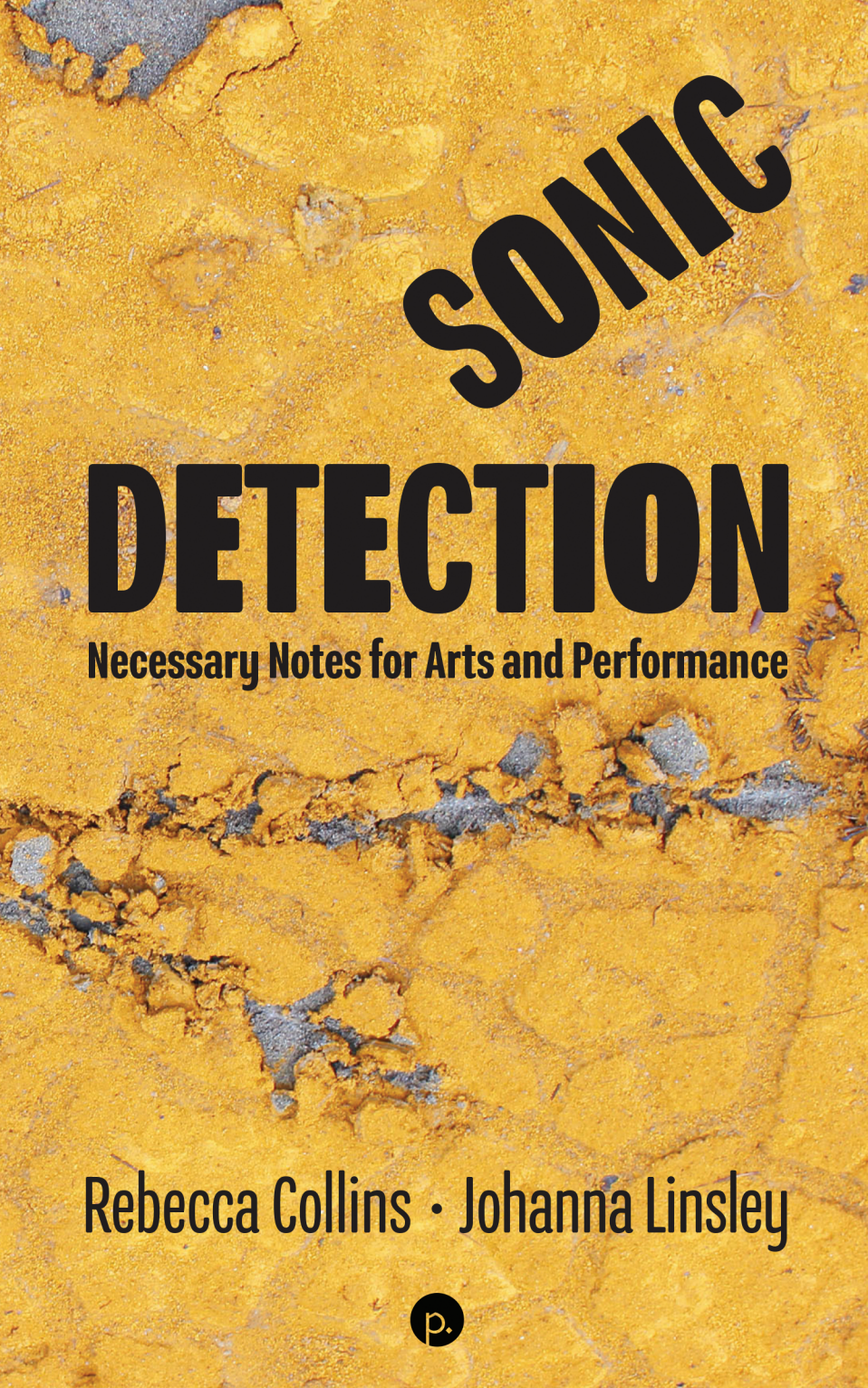


The background of the entire cover is a bright yellow, heavily textured surface, resembling aged paper or a mineral like ochre. It is marked by numerous irregular, dark grey or black cracks and fissures that run across the surface, giving it a weathered and organic appearance. The text is overlaid on this textured background.

SONIC

DETECTION

Necessary Notes for Arts and Performance

Rebecca Collins • Johanna Linsley



SONIC DETECTION

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Fig. 1. Detail from Hieronymus Bosch, *Ship of Fools* (1490–1500)

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SONIC

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For the Team.

NECESSARY NOTE

Briefing.

(Necessary Notes)

This is a detective story.

What follows is a book-within-a-book that arises from a long-term and ongoing collaboration based on listening as an expanded creative practice. “Necessary Note” is one distillation of a wide-ranging set of encounters with people, places, plants and animals, textures, infrastructures, processes, and other incidents. Across the rest of this book, we sometimes turn our ears to different versions of the same marvels, or return to the scene, maybe not of the crime but of the event or sensation. The different parts of this book form a kind of dossier that, taken together, represents our current attempt to articulate “sonic detection” as a method for tuning into the world. We have chosen to begin, though, with a detective story because we want to prioritize the value of atmosphere, oblique sensation, hunches, and other diffuse experiences as key parts of the method we are presenting. We want to get you in the mood.

It is a truism to say that places are “characters” in detective fiction, but it is also true that detective fiction is soaked in its own sense of place. Los Angeles, Mexico City, the Northumbrian island of Lindisfarne, the bridge connecting Sweden and Copenhagen. Or, in “Necessary Note,” a series of places mostly along the east coast of the UK. In a detective novel, the movement through a location is the story in a way that it isn’t in other

genres — movement motivated by dogged investigation and chance encounters, impossible coincidences, overheard conversations, and seemingly incidental details.

Most detective novels aren't *about* the place where they're set and the depiction might be wildly exaggerated or grossly inaccurate or simply unrecognizable to the people who live there. But location has a fundamental role in what we think may be most important about detective stories. We find the seed of an ethics in this fact about the genre: In a detective story, there is the possibility that any incidental, contingent, local event by the end *will have been necessary*. The convoluted future perfect tense is the point here. Through a prophetic looking-backward, contingency is redeemed in the detective novel.

This is a *sonic* detective novel, by which we mean that it proceeds through attention to what can be heard but also that it is attuned to the mixing and mutual production of different ways of making and perceiving phenomena — what the performance studies scholar Rebecca Schneider and poet and theorist Fred Moten, borrowing from the poet John Donne, might call “inter(in)animation.”¹ As sonic detectives, we undertake a listening practice with our whole bodies. Our methods of detection are developed through cultivation of attention and flights of the imagination.

All of this has something to do, we think, with noise. As the film theorist Lisa Coulthard notes in an essay on “The Listening Detective,” the genre of the detective novel “is actually quite noisy.” She goes on: “detectives take statements, listen to confessions, aggressively grill suspects, engage in scored pursuits, turn to auditory clues.”² Our understanding of noise is indebted to Marie Thompson's philosophy of noise in her book *Beyond*

1 Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (Routledge, 2011), 19.

2 Lisa Coulthard, “The Listening Detective: Thinking Music, Gender, and Transnational Crime's Affective Turn,” *Television & New Media* 19, no. 6 (2018): 554.

Unwanted Sound: Noise, Affect and Aesthetic Moralism.³ She argues that noise is commonly understood either as a disruptive—even corrupting—byproduct of communication that needs to be reduced or ideally eliminated, or else as a subversive interruption that can be wielded against normative structures. Against both of these, Thompson claims that noise is *necessary*. It's a dimension of sense, neither good nor bad, for which there needs to be an accounting.

Our detective novel proposes that in paying attention to the combination of place and noise a necessary account of the contingencies of the contemporary can be (over)heard. The contemporary UK. Our contemporary UK. What follows is an attempt to write a detective novel where the tense of its promise has shifted. Where a kind of sonic attention has already redeemed the contingent and is in the process of doing so again. It is an attempt to write a detective novel from inside one. Resort town, container ship terminal, capital city, former coal mining town, oil rig. Each place we investigate is emblematic, fundamental to the way the UK functions and dysfunctions. Like a lot of detective fiction, our story twists and turns, though its relation to cause and effect diverges. Causation in the conventional detective novel might be imagined on two tracks. One track is defined by an event—the crime—and a single culpable agent. The other track is the investigation, comprising every action the detective takes to connect crime with criminal. These actions are prompted by clues and hunches, which fuel a kind of libidinal economy: desire for revelation, promise of satisfaction, frustration, etc. Our story drifts from these tracks. Her voice—the voice of our client/accomplice/antagonist—is a prime mover of sorts: She initiates and guides the investigation. The inciting event is as-yet-unidentified, inchoate. In the place of clues, there is a series of song lyrics punctuating the action, briefly gathering and lightly organizing attention, and then releasing it in a different direction. Red herrings are everywhere.

3 Marie Thompson, *Beyond Unwanted Sound: Noise, Affect and Aesthetic Moralism* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

Casting ourselves as agents who deal in acoustic phenomena, we are multiple: The exact number of us is difficult to report. We deal in easily misinterpreted snippets, fragments, and the layered, overlapping materialities of the sonic. Threads appear and disappear. The banal, the miscellaneous, the misinformed, the tedious, and the untimely cling to our efforts. Among what might elsewhere be considered acoustic detritus, we listen long and we listen hard. This is a kind of attention that might offer a way out of a visual double bind: blink and you'll miss it; look too closely and you'll miss everything else.

If we seek an ethics in detective fiction, we also acknowledge the possible conservatism of its promise. We are concerned that the redemption of the incidental might be understood to mean that everything finds, or is put in, its place. We may be detectives, but we are not the police. Our investigation arises rather from the undeniable observation that everywhere around us, there is a structuring violence producing figures understood as dependent and therefore corrupting: the migrant, the benefits scrounger, all the familiar, stupid shorthand for the unproductive and undesirable. As we began writing this in 2016 and through its completion in the COVID-19 pandemic, the status of the terms “essential” and “vulnerable” exposed themselves as simultaneously more urgent than ever, uniquely contemporary, and historically continuous. Essential worker, vulnerable population, categories fundamentally conditioned by race, class, disability, markers of identity expressing the underlying project of white supremacy, patriarchy. The lives made available to work, subject to categorization as vulnerable, are not in themselves essential under this regime. What is essential, rather, is the violent abstraction (or abstraction of violence): economy, capital, which must be allowed to produce and reproduce itself, in spite of risk or insufficiency of protection. Capitalism produces sacrificial populations in a pervasive logic of domination where the valorization of the necessary and self-determined over the contingent and incidental designates groups — of people, types of bodies, forms of kinship and connection, areas of land and

water, animals, ecosystems and ecologies — as dispensable, disposable.

So here we try, modestly, to scramble the condition of the contingent. When we summon an idea of redemption, we are less interested in salvation than in salvage, in attempting a radical assessment of the wreckage unfolding at our feet as we listen to these necessary notes.

The First Thing We Hear Is a Splash.

(Somewhere in the English Channel)

Before anything else — before the knock, before anything — the first thing we hear is a splash. A pebble tossed from the shore, a dolphin leaping in the harbor, an anchor dropped from a 1000-foot G-class container ship.

The splash gives way to vibrations, ripples in the channel, flows and blockages in the water and on the seabed and below. Beating out the significance of a totality between sea and shore. If we can understand the logic and logistics of every entry and exit and planned entry and planned exit and failed entry and failed exit and non-entry and non-exit, then maybe we really will get somewhere. But a wave crashes, disrupting the pattern, and we have to start over.

That's how we know: This didn't have to have happened.

We hear a high-pitched shriek that goes on for hours and hours, throughout the night, until it is raw and wasted. Someone tells us that it is a fox giving birth and we realize we've had the ambiguous privilege of hearing an animal lose their voice.

Someone says something impossible but true — impossible given the circumstances but necessary. The circumstances will have to change. We turn to the vulnerable, which is to say, to everything.

That's how we learn: Everyone is a suspect.

We take shelter. We listen on the inside.

There is a history of watching in public in capital cities, in thrall to the crowd, and we are part of that history even if we can't be seen. More though, we are in a para-sonic story: crouching in hallways and landings, invested, compromised, eavesdropping. Through a keyhole, we hear a muffled conversation about bed-making, about refusing to lie in it. The scene of a bed-burning. A future without beds. We hear a group of people laughing, laughing at nothing, laughing at laughing, beyond control, possessed.

The sound is insistent, the volume immense but there are no certified records, only echoes and sustained (if warped) notes in policy documents and meeting minutes and contracts of work.

But there is evidence. It just isn't straightforward. Phenomena transform into figures. Shapes appear to us: a triangle, a grid, a spiral, a hole. Like musical notation, the shapes are present, pulsating and also aesthetic. They stretch out, leading to the past and proposing the future. They condense what we hear, make it intense, make it an event.

An event.

This is when we pack it in, shove it under the sofa, lock the doors and batten down the hatches. We busy ourselves with little tasks, distract ourselves with low-stakes arguments. We shuffle our feet, waiting and hoping, grinding our teeth and letting our gums bleed. What do we have to do with events?

Left eye twitch, right eye twitch. Eyebrow raised, raised.

And then, the knock.

The knocking grows louder and louder until it overcomes everything else, demands all of our attention. No, not demands: seizes. Until finally a voice soars above the knock — a feminine, feminized voice. The voice as feminine, as less material, but also fleshier than what is seen.

Opportunities and lies and limits and stories and songs and violences and sweetness and they are all there in that voice. It's a voice we will hear in different guises as our adventure unfolds, though we don't know it yet. A voice that will sound out as authority, partnership, threat, absence, and more. A voice that initiates a journey along the edge of an island. A voice that will

become so familiar, it's difficult to say how it feels — who we are — when we haven't yet heard it.

Open the door, she says.

I want to talk to you.

HER VOICE: A crisis is in the making. *The feelings of intense insecurity and impending doom that crisis implies do not necessarily occur only at a single point in time nor only in the context of visible "disaster."* A crisis leaves clues. *The description of a sequence of events as a "crisis" simplifies changes in multiple fields, involving various agents, into a unique event, so that a single moment, with a single agent, appears responsible for a collapse of the old order.* Here are your instructions. Start at the seaside like a holiday. Should be easy. All wrapped up but I need to be sure. An easy opportunity. All in the timing and right away. Anyone could do it but I like you. Keep your ears to the ground. Something happened. Who what where when and how far it goes. A little seaside affair. Can't be too careful.

A search. There will be songs to find, to listen for. Songs for a search. Seaside songs. Songs to salvage.

I know I can trust you.

Show me.

We Slink to the Hotel Bar.

(Bournemouth, South Coast of England)

We take the case.

There is a stubborn, lingering streak of reluctance but we rub it out and resolve to make a good start. A start like we mean to go on.

We turn our attention to a cheerful sing-along tune and a low underlying rumble of lament. A sliding brass note of decay punctured by the high-pitched jingling of bittersweet remembrance.

The sound of faded glamour.

A British seaside resort.

Baroque, Romantic strings warm up the chords for the invention of leisure in the eighteenth century and later we hear the shuttering of factories, mines, offices, and the invention of free time. Bromley parish church's annual outing to the seaside; Firbeck Colliery Workers' Annual Seaside Outing; two hundred World War II veterans treated to a seaside outing; taxi outing takes children on special seaside trip; the center for Armenian Information and Advice annual outing to Hastings; Deptford children visit Hastings for seaside outing; fundraising for a refugee kids' trip to the seaside; North London Prabhati Sangha annual seaside trip.

Another popular tune: creaking burnt-out piers and empty music halls. Overflowing rubbish bins and predatory seagulls.

Crumbling Victorian drama in a minor key. Cheap flights and package holidays to the Costa Brava.

Ding! Ding! Ding!

Someone is hiding out in a grimy boarding house, listening through the cardboard-thin walls to the couple in the other room having sex. There's a sleazy murder plot brewing and it all hinges on a ventriloquist dummy. It's a case of mistaken identity and the twist is the husband actually died of a heart attack.

But.

This is not our mystery. We're listening in a different key.

We slink to the hotel bar, seeking gorgeous anonymity and soothingly worn edges. Cream-colored walls, old-but-clean burgundy carpets, vinyl chairs, a tropical fish tank, and a bay window facing the pleasure gardens. The gardens are immaculate. Sounds of a gentle, contented crowd having an early drink.

It starts to rain like it always does, raindrops mixing with the clink of china teacups and cocktail glasses. Drop. Pigeon warbles. Drop. Seagull cries. Drop. Canned bagpipe music. Drip, drip, drop. The silence of dead crows, piano-playing parishioners, gurgling aquariums, squeaking plastic ducks, chattering middle managers.

A faint ringing in our ears and a tremble in our hands.

Too much coffee or not enough sugar?

We gaze out of a window onto a public square, except it's a triangle and it's on privately owned land. There is a couple — a man and a woman, both white — feeding pigeons. The pigeons are perched all over the woman's body, eating from her shoulder, the palm of her hand, the crook of her elbow.

A murmur. A ripple. A rumor.

The sea, the sea.

We harbor doubt. We are both doubt and certainty. This is all of the information and none of the information. Training ourselves to distinguish noise and noise, to suss out the difference. To know what to listen for and when to hold our tongues. To open ourselves up to the possibility of an event without mistaking causes for effects. Oh, the nausea of the noise of it all.

Enough.

Time to focus. Let's make something of this. A chance to be clear and precise. Precision? Yes, oh yes, we like precision. Be exact, go on. Accent forming, intonation and inflection in place. Try a more authoritative, interrogative tone. Go. Go. Go, again.

Eyes to the left, nope, no. Eyes up and to the right. Image, voice, remember. Remembering. Sniff, shrug. Wait, there's no hurry. Listen, we're here to listen, remember? Tongues to the roof of the mouth.

Throats are trembling. Something is welling. Something is brimming and now spilling. Cry, vomit, hug. Pause. Cry, vomit, hug.

Listen. Listen. Listen.

We are all ears.

Notes from a piano are ringing out like a prelude to unfinished phrases, then like trumpet calls. Mm, ah, mm we are breathing. Earthy smells of peaty moss mix with sandalwood incense and dripping wax. Sound crashes into vaulted stone ceilings, cold and clear.

Gosh, what loose flexible wrists the pianist must have.

*Bucket and shovel and promenade bandstand
Weather shelter the glass blown out
Substantial investment eternal off-season
Helter skelter dreamland returns*

*And still and something unresolved
Oh-oh-oh, the Margate return*

*Regional effects of an austere summer
An austere nation a profligate sea
Staccato squeaks of pleasure in ruin
Tourist demand exorbitant fee*

*And still and something unresolved
Oh-oh-oh, the Hastings return*

This is the story

*Of a once-great empire
And what happens next*

*Penny sweets and falling off groynes
The magical walk from the caravan site
Seagull cries a threat and a warning
A simple, fond melody for low winter light*

*And still and something unresolved
Oh-oh-oh the Bournemouth return
— “The Bournemouth Return”*

That was it. The first song. It turns over in our mouths, fizzes in our ears. We hum it again, work out the chord structure, try out a harmony. If this is the first song, there must be more where that came from.

Now we want to find them.

Thinking carefully, we pass around sandwiches, each buttered on sliced white bread, cut in neat squares and placed in a plastic freezer bag. Flavor options include spam, corned beef, boiled ham, or egg. In separate bags, there are damp flannels for washing around the mouth, ears, nose, and nails after eating.

Fed and clean, we lie on the pebble beach. Tinny arcade tunes beckon to us from the pier. Our vision blurs.

Ding! Ding! Ding!

A puzzled glance. Have the seagull cries become transactional?

Then gradually, the roar of the surf is drowned out by the hum of computer server rooms and the groan of central air-conditioning. The fish-and-chip shops and tourist tat fade away and in their place a series of banks, insurance companies, and other financial institutions rise up. The pebbles beneath us stretch and smooth into polished floors. We are in a massive foyer. Glass and steel and white paint and geometrical shapes. Not glossy like the head office. No marble, no polished wood grown in a specially planted forest in Scandinavia. The building doesn't

rise vertically towards God — it sprawls horizontally, cradled by gentle, rolling green space and a very convenient car park.

Still fucking impressive.

It feels like the solution to a mystery: the affluence of this place against the notion of the British seaside resort as crumbling, neglected. Of a decline that is somehow sad but still to be expected or even enjoyed. There's a story in this particular seaside town on this particular stretch of the South Coast with a different character altogether. International finance doesn't go by itself; someone has to manage operations and administration and internal IT. Where does it happen? Here. Right here. We thought it was all promenades and candy floss? Ha!

We think again.

A crackle of high fives. Go team. A low, confident stream of language flows over and around: asset and wealth management, global knowledge network analysis, corporate and client banking. The support systems of a High Performance Workplace.

This is England. This is the South. Capitalism was invented here and if these people aren't in charge anymore, if the money that moves around in here isn't strictly speaking theirs, if they're no longer the lenders to the world — well they process the transactions of the ones who are. A place to navigate events. Ride them out, mitigate the risk while leveraging the opportunities. Make bets. Fix the terms. And someone has to monitor the network that keeps the lights on in the background. The workaday backbone of the masters of potentiality. If we don't like it, what are we going to do about it?

We're not sure we even understand it.

Oy, oy! Come over here, listen. No, a bit more to the right. Bright tones, practiced enthusiasm, approachable but nonsense. Matching leisure wear. Warm, cozy fleeces of various colors. Oh, cute, yeah. Ruby, Allison, Emma, Priya, Alexia, Rona, Sonali, Fiona, Monique. Flying high, that's them. Sometimes as high as a kite, wink, wink. They're calling us over. Inviting us along.

A revolving glass door looms before us, an inhuman swoosh accompanying every turn. The ladies talk to us. Fancy a G&T?

White wine spritzer? A fine line between too much caffeine and not enough alcohol. Ha ha ha ha.

Let's have a right good laugh, a giggle.

Swoosh. Swoosh.

Watch your step! What, parked outside? Oh yeah, one each, standard Audi TT Coupé. The fleet. Personalized number plates to tell them apart.

Another swoosh and we are on the pavement, facing a line of motorized jewels, then swept into passenger seats. Those number plates chiming as doors slam in unison. TOY. FUN. POP. NOW.

There's something that sounds like power — but not quite like power — in the air in here. Each and every one of us has their feet up on an L-shaped sofa and we've stopped counting the bottles of sauv blanc. Soft rock from the 1970s drifts around the room along with chatting voices. Little dishes of office gossip like canapés. Inside jokes, some cutting deeper than intended. Lines of affinity and even genuine care which are nevertheless unstable for being soaked in competition and a philosophy of scarcity, of get-it-while-you-can. Still, the sheer overwhelming comfort of this room is intoxicating. Or is that the wine?

Peals of laughter emit from the other end of the open-plan kitchen-lounge at every possible pitch, from soaring soprano to engine-like rumble.

These ladies are hilarious.

Oh, the poetics of the skylight, the designer radiator, the ocean view.

If we feel the slightest edge of unease, of compromise, it is soothed by the tantalizing undertones of a secret about to be revealed. We are stretching our attention, hoping to accommodate the full outline of an event that is starting to crystallize, here in this upscale seaside bungalow.

But now it feels like their voices are sloshing around in our ears, like inside our ears and it's making us a bit dizzy, a bit queasy, like our balance is a bit, well a bit off really and now it's not inside at all, but really, really outside. All over. Like everywhere.

We are prone, incapacitated and still going through something. Fiona and Ruby are using the concatenate function on Excel to impossible effect, combining shrieks and sighs. Alexia is growling arcane clauses into an employee handbook. Rona and Monique are harmonizing a negotiating strategy over a phosphorescent scrawl. A trilling sound, a chirp, a squeak. We have underestimated, miscalculated. Sonali, Allison, Emma, and Priya have formed a circle around us, and they are chanting. We can't make out the words, but it is definitely, inarguably the case that we are being initiated.

We drift in and out of consciousness. We have been listening for a long time. For far too long.

A groan then a sickening snap and all goes silent. When we come to, the ladies are nowhere to be heard. We are huddling around a granite kitchen island, clutching hands, squeezing our eyes shut, torn between an overwhelming sense that we have located the beginning and the end of the world and a desperate need to get the hell out of here, pronto.

*Not actually the fourth most
Expensive real estate
In the world but
The most expensive
Coastal location
In the UK*

*Making money
Out of money*

*Private impulse
For the taking*

*Premium bank branch
Service exclusive
Accounts exceeding
Fifty thousand
Or customers invited to use*

A different branch

Making money

Out of money

Moving money

Out of making

Role of nations the

Workshop of the creditor

To the broker of the

World human resources department

Second home

—“The Canford Cliffs HSBC Cash Machine”

Dry mouth. Throbbing head. We are shaken, shaking. What was that?

The lyrics of this last song are stuck in our ears. We raise our heads to try and shake them out only to find we are in a bright, cheerful café with a menu handwritten on a chalkboard behind the counter. A deep moan escapes our lips, and someone brings us a medicinal flat white. We breathe. We close our eyes and open them again, our vision returning to focus in jerky increments. Fruit scone crumbs are scattered across the polished surface of the table in front of us, taking on the aspect of materials of varying density. Sand? Soil? Salt?

We examine our wider surroundings. The café faces a public square we noticed earlier. A square in the shape of a triangle.

Ding! Ding! Ding!

Owww. Owww. Ouch!

A concert triangle ringing—or tinkling, really—in our heads. We make a connection. Edges, angles forming, structuring our thoughts and informing our movements. A metaphorical bucket of freezing water pours over our heads, and we are alert again. We leave the café, stepping out onto the public triangle, struck by its suddenly auspicious shape. Wind on our faces and in our hair. Easterly? Southwesterly? Northeasterly? A light breeze, or is it? The remnants of a gale, an offshore storm? The

edges of the triangle have become more distinct, the space inside set off from the outside like an arena. There is a crowd gathering like thunderclouds. A roar of voices crashes then resolves into a discernible chant. YOU'RE GETTING SACKED IN THE MORNING.

A contest. A chance to show what we're made of. Is it possible that the investigation so far has been purely preliminary? A test? A hazing ritual? It sounds like the only way out is through the game.

All together now, in a deep and confident tone, throat clearing.

Triangulation: determining locations by forming triangles from known points. Spontaneous applause surges then lapses into a slow sarcastic clap. But there's a satisfying click like a key fitting into a lock. We know what a right answer sounds like. It's more fun if you win.

We brainstorm. What else have we got? Echolocation? Right on. Signal searches? Sure thing! The sound of the body in relation to other bodies. Nailed it!

Bodies, relations, locations. Different sides to an event with shifting angles. Maps, mapping. Figures, methods, modes that let us think about a dynamic, a pitch, a tone. Or vice versa.

And still.

Lessons learned but as we're reactivating our maths education we can't help but feel that we're missing something. The triangle begins to glow and pulse with an occult insistence. We gaze out to sea and the horizon until it appears to us as the horizon. The edge, the limit of what we know or can know.

That's it! The missing piece is the unknown. The unknowing.

The unknowing detective reaches out to the unknown object. When the unknown object is known, catalogued, filed away, or destroyed, the unknowing detective can move on to other fields of the unknown.

No.

We refuse to know as we're told. Drenched in an otherworldly glow, we hear notes from this world otherwise. Our investigation proceeds as an undoing. An undoing of unknowing? A test we will have to fail or one we don't show up for.

But what will she say?

The triangle powers down. The whirl of an industrial fan and the cleaning solution smell of a morning after and the dislocated feeling of a nightclub with the lights on. Our chests tighten and our breathing accelerates. We begin to understand the stakes of these early decisions and articulations. What's done is done and still we would like to carry on. We would like to hear the next song.

All is quiet as we trudge through the sand, the crunch of our footsteps and the eternal accompaniment of the waves fading with repetition. Just before dawn, we hear a chorus of seabirds. The sun crests the skyline and we keep walking.

The Coast Is a Border by Water.

(*In Transit by Water*)

HER VOICE: Considerate eavesdroppers, you listen well. Now go further. Not a seaside jaunt but a coastal incursion. Sound out edges for access. Zone in on violence. Attune to procedures, flags of convenience, closed borders. *What is at stake is the figurability or representability of our present and its shaping effect on political action. In a strong interpretation, the mapping of capitalism is a precondition for identifying any “levers,” nerve centers, or weak links in the political anatomy of contemporary domination.* Be brave but do practice caution. *Any adequate “answer” to a problem, in turn, will contain a view of the strategic points of intervention — of the “levers” by which the structure may be maintained or changed; and an assessment of those who are in a position to intervene but are not doing so.* Find a node in a supply chain and figure it out. In a system there are choke points, risk zones. Map out an area. Study the form. Define axes to chart movement. Determine a trajectory and likely consequences of intervention. Your songs help you navigate. Effect a change. Pull a lever. You will know what to do.

The sand is pristine, the sun is shining, and the temperature has climbed to twenty-seven degrees Celsius. The kind of summer day that exists only in wintertime memories of holidays. Still, the water is bracing. Push sand between toes, let cold liquid seep

and rise to ankles then shins then knees then midriff. One two three — in. Plunge head neck shoulders under. Let water fill ears noses mouths.

We emerge to breathe. Go further, she said. The current tugs at us and we notice a shift in terms. From margin to boundary. From seaside to coast.

The coast is a border by water.

Vibrations build between Bournemouth and Cherbourg-Octeville, Great Yarmouth and Wijk aan Zee, Hull and Norddeich. Between Dundee and Lemvig, Aberdeen and Stavanger. We hear agitated waters. Complex harmonies connecting the industries and infrastructures along the coast: the rhythmical rise of container shipping; the bassline drop in domestic manufacturing; the tonal key shift from coal to oil; the pulsing beat of regeneration and erosion and logistics and privatization.

We hear ancient battle fortifications. We climb over a concrete sound mirror, an acoustic early warning system. We protect our ears against a Long-Range Acoustic Device, used by maritime companies to send signals over long distances, and by police forces as a weapon in crowd control.

We take this all in and it keeps on coming. One hundred and thirty asylum seekers are relocated to a seaside hotel in Folkestone to alleviate crowding in Croydon detention centers. Teenage boys from Syria and Eritrea find a temporary home in a former elderly care center in Whitstable. A decade-long resident of Ramsgate is deported to Afghanistan.

Thirty sperm whales are stranded by the southern beaches of the North Sea — lost, perhaps, because shallow waters and the presence of sloping mud and sandbanks impeded their sonar abilities. A surge in all directions, arms flailing. Residents of Holderness on the coastline of York gather up their possessions as the sea erodes the cliff beneath their homes.

The sound of the sea is made from tiny bubbles simultaneously vibrating and bursting along the shore. We get churned up by a swell. Thousands of starfish wash up on the Kent coast following a sharp dip in sea temperature. Tens of hundreds of thousands of velvet crabs, lobsters, whelks, scallops, razorfish,

dover sole, cod, ling, wrasse, and sand eels wash up near Bridlington. We hear rumors rush forth, sense and nonsense mingle.

There is more, more, more, and we lose our orientation. We need desperately to reach the surface but which way is up? We can't think — we can only move — so we start to swim, hoping we aren't sending ourselves deeper. Finally, we emerge, coughing seawater. Our vision comes into focus and our relief is short-lived. We are no longer faced with a vast horizontal shore. Instead, an even greater verticality confronts us: a ferocious cliff separating sea from land, white chalk gleaming.

A sentimental tune shaped like a bluebird slides off the cliff then collapses on us with all the force of a sovereign nation. A defensible border. People are dying in the Mediterranean and we hear tight, angry hissing about the English Channel. We struggle under an analysis of push versus pull factors, the hostile environment, the need to secure the border so British holiday-makers can go on European holidays. The Channel must not be crossed so the Channel can be crossed.

We resurface. Our task is to find a lever. Effect a change. The sheer cliff face offers no purchase, its symbolic force too monolithic. We take a moment to float on our backs buoyed by salt water as we marvel at the awesome beauty. Then we swim and the restless, twitching, and ineluctable coast shifts again.

We Will Know What to Do When We Hear It.

(Port of Felixstowe, East Anglia)

We are in a zone. Not a zone where “flow” might happen, or “letting go,” or “kicking into gear.” An in-between zone. A compromise zone. A dream zone.

We have surfaced on the outskirts of a shipping container port miles north of where we started. Sand dunes, long grass, and timber-enforced pathways. Ears slosh with seawater. Containers and lorries just visible over a small hill. A sleepy seaside village does a development deal, gets a nature reserve in return.

This is the kind of zone we understand.

Now to find a lever.

Her words pulse. Cavernous misshapen frown lines appear like jigsaw puzzle pieces that should fit but don't.

Time to dip into our toolkit. Deploy our methods. We use sound to orientate ourselves, cupping hands to ears on dark silent nights. We develop a repertoire of whistles to simulate the sounds of a vortex, the creaking chain of an uncoiled swing in a playground, the lid of a wheelie bin, the sound of a council-funded CCTV webcam switching screen-shots. We use stray inadvertent mouth sounds to conduct conversations via spit-swapping, belching, surreptitious coughing. We develop new

bodily logics, transmitted through fleshy channels. Before we get carried away though, just a quick question.

How long since we've seen another person?

We look around. On one side, miles of empty beach. On the other, the perimeter fence surrounding the port. Beyond the fence, plenty of movement but no visible human activity. Not a human body detectable within the range of (any of) our senses.

There are ghost stories from this part of the coast. Stories with callow upstarts disturbing spirits of Saxon kings. Violation of sacred boundaries. Invisible rules. Move carefully. Maids make up beds with severe, efficient strokes. Starchy white bed sheets crackle and committed rationalists have supernatural encounters.

Watch out for sparse dialogue. Protagonists here harbor a catalogue of ticks. Heart-rending social awkwardness and off-putting arrogance and a vague unawareness of work and a terrifying sheet dance. Summonings. Invisible borders abound. Authoritarian phantoms circulate. We are afraid.

We need another method. A system.

Rules for special access are strange, arcane, and immovable. We will attempt to break the rules. We need a watertight structure where all the pieces slot together. Solid management built on flexibility and reliability increasing our efficiency and economizing our energy expenditure in the investigation three-, four-, or five-fold. We study marine traffic maps, keep records of incoming ships, direct a rescue craft in the absence of visual aid, argue over ratio of distance to speed, distinguish between dead ahead and dead astern, create and test prototypes for elaborate long-arm devices.

This is what we need. Find an axis; study a grid.

Remember: We are eavesdroppers. Experts in illicit information. Secret listeners infiltrate borders between public and private space. We need to listen to interlocking modular units. Physically feel the clang of remote-operated cranes.

We will know what to do when we hear it.

Time to deduce our target. Overhear histories of regulatory convergence, upskill in infrastructure aesthetics, and at the very least gawp at the sheer scale of some massive, massive ships.

Right ear press then left ear press then whole face pressed against high-tensile perimeter fence as jowls join to form grid of indented flesh. Then bodies press hard to find weakness in chain link. Visually, a kind of whimsical counterpoint to port security perimeter. Physically, an effective if painful reinforcement. Press upper back hard against chain link. We are breaching a perimeter.

We hear ourselves say, in a system there can be chaos, rupture, an undisciplined racket. We live in this chaos or we are this chaos.

An undisciplined racket.

An acoustic intervention and right now we are inside the shipping container port.

*Way on out beyond the ocean drive
Dissatisfaction gives way to desire
The container holds a promise
To unburden this heavy load*

*Imagine then fill then float
Imagine then roll, roll on out*

*Wave the flag for convenience
Use heroic systematic smiles
Circulation brings consumption
Split waters leave community cold*

*Imagine then fill then float
Imagine then roll, roll on out*

*Let there be plenty
Let there be none
The work continues
Cannot be undone*

Imagine then fill then float
Imagine then roll, roll on out

Vast are the acres
Huge are the stacks

A terminal of tension
Surface yields no cracks

Imagine then fill then float
Imagine then roll, roll on out
— “RORO Your Boat”

Puzzle still pulsing, shapes shifting into lines. Shifting into remote control ship-to-shore gantry cranes and two long shiny levers marked X and Y.

Excellent.

We have found it. Or them?

Unmanned and totally unclear which does what.

Confirmation. This is the shipping container port. Check. Lever(s) located, now what? We are acutely aware of the errors of the solitary eavesdropper. Step one getting caught. Step two getting stabbed. Banish thoughts of Polonius behind a curtain, skewered by Hamlet. We have a job to do.

Deep berth vessels line up. Concrete and corrugated metal boxes abound. This is a system we can really get inside. A grid of operations. Take note.

X is the horizontal axis.

Y is the vertical axis.

Study the movements. Get to grip with the logics of this X versus Y environment.

X is a sheet ghost.

Y is a neatly made bed.

Or:

X is a pebble beach, punctuated by rock groynes and smoking shacks and little wooden fishing boats like a dream of England in the precious sleeping head of a conservative MP.

Y is the sea and the air and everything that's more than you already know.

Think of battleships. A game played on a ruled grid. Each player marks their fleet of ships (including their battleships), concealing them from the other player. Alternating "shots," each player attempts to locate the position of their opponent's vessel. She wants us to take a shot. Win or lose on the alternatives but which one, X or Y?

X quantifies the success of efforts by the university bursar to lobby government in opposition to port nationalization.

Y indicates portside land assets held by the university.

X is eleven metres of depth added to the main approach channel of the harbor in 1989.

Y is maximum TEU, the unit of measurement used to indicate cargo capacity of a container ship.

X is the number of months without shore leave an able-bodied seaman from the Philippines has undertaken over the past six years.

Y is an individual consumer boycott of Amazon.

Try again, make it personal.

X is the least you can do.

Y is the slightest effort.

X is the number of people you need to keep alive.

Y is the number of people keeping you alive.

So, which one do we pull?

X makes Y faster.

Y makes X more careful.

X makes Y more decisive.

Y makes X weigh options.

X sees the big picture.

Y cares about detail.

X knows how to break the rules.

Y can follow instructions.

X plus Y equals competence porn: We all get off on a job well done. Stand on shoulders on tiptoes. That's how we pull one of them: all off balance and out of kilter, fingers crossed and hoping for the best.

An alarm sounds. A border breach, volume increasing, fingers in ears. Call for backup.

No response.

Call again.

On hold. Panpipe music and an automated answer phone message.

No wait, hold the line, we are getting through to someone making a speech or something. We pulled a lever, that's established. Then nothing happened or everything happened.

We're sorry or you're welcome.

A cacophony of ringtones floods our ears with a recital of mobile phone trends from the last decade. A flurry of text messages, then an almighty PING! as our email inboxes overflow. Instructions, details, plans. We feel giddy. Messages about cliffs, vapor belts, rental terms for the spa pavilion. Local playgrounds and amusement parks, a recipe for caffeine-enhanced hearing, watercolor paintings of froth and foam, a ship called the Industrial Dolphin. Where did this data come from? What do we do with it?

The hold music cuts off and a voice breaks in, says this is your HQ.

HQ?

Sure, they say. You did well. Pulled the lever, you're levelling up. You're going to need some support. Have you checked your messages? Total admin solutions, investigative wall, and a crack team at the other end ready and waiting to assemble your work into a semblance of order. Entry phone system then a creaking lift with a manual metal door. Plush velvet on walls with shiny oak between mirrors. Ear recognition enter only with tone change to find large leather-upholstered armchairs, mug holders, and an endless supply of custard creams. You're going to love it. Check your messages.

We hang up abruptly, overwhelmed. This is new. We've never had an office. Never had an assistant. We think about luxury cruise ships with all-inclusive drinks packages, Egyptian-cotton towels, and on-board entertainment with an all-you-can-eat

buffet, serenity deck, sauna yoga, and a personal trainer. All our needs accounted for.

What a dream.

We think about an artist who requested a series of paintings in porcelain enamel over the phone. The story goes that he sat with the company's color chart out in view sketching the design onto graph paper. The company supervisor, listening at the other end, had the same type of paper and was able to map out the shapes in their desired position. We like this idea.

We will use this.

We will call back our HQ, ask them to sketch out some shapes: a triangle then a grid. A mystery about the links between consumption, production, and distribution. Ask them to follow up a lead about the supply chain for our laptops. Manufacturing and distribution processes historically divided due to individually managed modes of transportation and company functions which now form complex interlocking systems. We need to know more. Have them call a Martello Tower in Felixstowe, a former defense fort. Set up a meeting with the Eyes and Ears of the Coast, a group of volunteers who make up the National Coastwatch Institute. We need intelligence on the latest developments in GPS tracking technology. We will give them dates and names, not in any order.

But wait, first we've other work to do. We buy red lanyard, sticky tape, bubble envelopes, and cheap crayons. We bundle this up with some inky napkin doodles, newspaper cut-outs, polaroid snapshots, and post-it notes we've made since we started the investigation. On the package we write FOR HER in thick marker, add the address, and pop it in the post.

Only, we have no address. We have no number. We cannot call or send anything at all. Parcel under arm, we will have to go there.

Just a question.

Where?

Should I say yes

Should I confirm

*Can I reach out
Take my turn*

*Can I say yes
Step in the light
Into position
For the fight*

*Care of the self
The care of caring
Tiny increments
Get better all the time*

Oh, better all the time

*Should I say no
Should I reject
The power of
My self respect*

*Can I say no
Stage my critique
Plant my feet
Not appear weak
Overturning
Over it already
It isn't over
It hasn't begun*

Has not yet begun

*Will you say yes
Will you confirm
Will you reach out
It's our turn
We can say yes*

Sign your name here
Training complete
A friendly work drink
Appointment to meet
Oh, where do we meet?
 —“Meeting Minutes”

Whistling along with this latest tune, we check into our accommodation, Mother’s Ruin, which when we booked sounded great. The advert claimed superior interior design, a color palette of ochre, sand, pale aqua, and champagne. The ideal environment to think through this conundrum between seaside and coast, unexpected HQs and the consequences of a lever, with adjectives like elegant, modern, and fresh.

Except it’s actually a beach hut.

Should we call home or take a lover? Tempting but we’re keen to keep our domestic lives out of the frame, not least to protect the ones we love or could love from whatever this event is or turns out to be.

This is a decision whose terms we may revisit.

Follow the sensations: panting and thick fog, the scratching of a pen, a crackle of static, the chink of medals on a blazer, a badly stuffed hatchling gull, national pride at the low incidence of rabies, a childhood fascination with wolves, the crunch of a paper jam in a photocopier, the embarrassed sigh of malware installed after opening a dodgy email message.

We think about illicit affairs. The abdication of a king, his lover hiding out waiting for divorce papers to be settled. Words like “secret lover,” “premature ejaculation,” and “constitutional crisis” are on loop in our minds along with images of the site of the last seaborne invasion of England in 1667 and the need to reckon with the birth of logistics, the minimization of physical labor, the optimization of energy, space, and resources.

We feel overwhelmed by loneliness all wrapped up in a damp sticky cold we are unable to shake. We are learning that to destabilize a system, all you really need to do is listen. But given the complexity of the event we could really use some visual aids to

back this all up and given the fact we have just been rewarded with an HQ, more than sipping cocktails and staring at the sunset, we could absolutely make use of a solid base to build out from. So how about we set out to find this HQ and, on the way, check in with her. Surely she is ready to shake our hands, pat us on the back, chalk up our brownie points, or at the very least throw us a bone.

We Take the Train to Meet Her.

(In Transit by Train)

The clank of metal rushing over land and the low hum of shifts in body language. Heavy breath and a laugh and a leap and just making it. A pre-recorded voice Received Pronunciation coded female—cajoling. A conductor's voice deep Geordie accent—firm or accommodating. Acoustic properties particular to confined spaces. Sounds are also smells or physical sensations. The rattle of a loose chair table. Fried noodles. Arms pressed against the sides of the body. Muffled death metal and coconut shampoo. A stiff neck. Not actively comfortable and not noticeably distressing. Isn't work, isn't leisure. A collectivity tempered by solitude, a kind of robust loneliness, a non-relation. The British intercity rail service is expensive and unreliable but in the off-peak hours it does support a proper depersonalization. A relief.

We take the train to meet her.

Feeling good, really good. Maybe a tiny constriction in the chest and a slightly elevated heart rate, barely detectable. Minor physical elaborations of excitement and anticipation. Dry mouth. Churning stomach, tapping toes. This is what confidence looks like on the inside. We chew our lips. We smile and cringe at sudden spontaneous memories. We chat and fall silent. We wander to the buffet car for a snack and pocket a celebratory packet of Maltesers.

Because we did something. We did a good job.

Pass the time. Phone reception is patchy and the promise of Wi-Fi optimistic. Paperbacks from WH Smith or similar. Library books. Books left behind. Books about trains, set on trains, or otherwise train-like in their composition. Trains within trains. She will congratulate us.

Recognize achievement. Imagine our new HQ. A door with a frosted glass window and gold lettering, perfect for framing a silhouette. Trace the letters with our fingertips and think: We made it. Inside, the functional space. Admin central. Reports on outcomes and responding to inquiries and documenting processes to cover our arse to know the rules to be able to break them. A place to coordinate rhythms, amplify impact, communicate transparency. Transparently. The force of this institution is what makes it irresistible. Dear all, please remember to return your coffee mugs to cool your hot desks to weaponize attention to nod vigorously to inhale robustly to send reminders to remind gently to legislate fairness to bar your windows to deny birds to swarm intelligence to relax to unload test animals in the loading docks to keep the lift free from corrosive acids to forget your childhoods to unmask the invisibility zone to interpret silence to deserve territory to rationalize evacuation to test often to make charcoal impressions to repair the edges to always and already and immediately be prepared to contain collapse distribute an event. The difference between the universal and the miscellaneous is contingency and office space.

Stop.

The train pulls into our station stop.

Water in our charcoal-filtered bottles sloshes from side to side and the wind around the carriage reminds us of the ocean. The train comes to a standstill, releasing passengers into movement. All around us, people are anxious, gathering bags, laptops, phones, crisp packets, mini wine bottles, jackets, musical instruments, babies. They tell each other not to forget dry cleaning bags and wrapped packages on the overhead shelves. They bump into each other, tell the other person to go ahead. They

make phone calls, explain delays, ask for directions. One leg of the journey complete, on to the next.

We depart the train calmly, easily.

HER VOICE: You pulled the lever you should not have pulled.

This Is It. The Center. Right?

(The Thames Estuary, then London)

We should have known.

There is consensus on this one point, but it shatters at the next question. What, exactly, should we have known? How to choose levers? How to pick clients?

Don't act on incomplete information. The buck stops somewhere else. Don't get caught. Speak for yourself. Decisions are conceivable but should the full force of their consequences fall on us? Don't just sit there. Don't indulge analysis paralysis. Don't overstate your own importance. We should have known better. Shrug shoulders. Shift the blame. But we have fallen at the first hurdle. Blame haste. Blame hesitation. Hands wave in the air, struggling to make democratic decisions. Then a minute splintering as collective expectations fracture. Take stock. Take ourselves into account.

Fragile is one word for it. Delicate webs of support producing temporary conditions for well-being. The knowledge that we are necessary to one another, so real it fills our hearts and our throats, and the lead-weight fear that we are insufficient. We make phone calls to check in. We eat together and talk over each other and hurt each other and we listen as well as we can. We make sacrifices for each other. It would not be possible to carry on alone, but the margins are thin and some of us are more vulnerable than others. The case is everything and everywhere,

work and not work. We are the detectives and we have no life. If we can't take care of ourselves, nobody else will do it for us. If we don't live anywhere, we are going to get sick. Sicker.

We need to boost our numbers.

Though we are not exclusive, we are not wholly inclusive. Could we be open to the idea of expansion? Shall we take what we can get from this HQ and shore up our reserves? Rub shoulders with a more experienced team, get tips on how to exploit our senses. Or (whisper it) seek the tools, stories, songs for something else. For flourishing. There may be comrades on the inside.

It's decided. We will send ourselves to the center and we will come back when the tide turns. We will tell her what we have heard from listening in on the inside.

The sound of water changing direction. We cup hands, dip them in, bring them to our lips and taste. Not as salty as the sea. Too salty to be fresh. Brackish. Estuary water. The tide is turning at the mouth of a major river. Levels are rising. We allow ourselves to be lifted and carried inland. Towards the center, we imagine and hope. The estuary is choppy and dangerous, full of suspended sediment whose movement and accumulation is complex. Just like ours. There is a sound of sucking like a murderous appetite, but the river is a river and has no sonic register for old violences or new ones. We listen instead to vibratory remnants of earth-moving projects: the contemporary fully automated deepwater container port requiring twenty-seven million square meters of riverbed dredging; the late eighteenth-century dock complex built by and for the city's slave traders, a symbol and structure of primary catastrophe. We see few people, but we hear the spectral resonance of expeditionary ships and trade ships and war vessels. A volume so heavy it can seem inaudible. We work to pick out particular tones, a partial score but still expressible. We listen and listen and drift.

It has always been late afternoon.

On the bank, there is an esplanade and a creaking funicular. A caravan park. A portable radio playing 1990s hip-hop. On the

lay-by of a motorway we lose ourselves in the repetitive catharsis of the Doppler effect as cars approach and retreat. Then we lie on our backs on a golf course, listening to synchronized lawn mowers in the distance. We catalogue the medicinal properties of common weeds and force our lips to mimic the songs of robins, martins, chaffinches, and blackbirds. We develop a refined sensitivity to the distinctions between a variety of bug bites and skin allergies. A light rain is a phenomenon among other phenomena. Walking along a road verge and sheltering under an overpass, we feel variously exposed and unremarkable.

Adolescent time and not only because it is mostly teenagers we encounter. Late afternoon houses a dull intensity. Time stretches, becoming both thin and taut. We are waiting for something to happen. We are not confident anything will or that we'd notice if it did.

A hum of masculinity compiles and confirms itself. Young men moving in groups. We are wandering through a suburban town, and we catch eyes with the members of one of these groups, as they cross the road on the way to cinematic adventure. Their sense of themselves as subjects of observation is micro-charged with low-key defiance or amused condescension or mild interest or a chafing wariness.

Further along in a different town altogether, we find ourselves next to a driving range. Hundreds of golf balls have accumulated along the river pathway and six or seven kids have irresistibly assembled to fling them at one another. As we approach, one of the kids, balancing on a bike, shouts at his friends to pause.

Nick, relax! Tarik, relax! Let them pass.

We ask a dozen or more kids for directions to the center but get no precise answer. The center is not here. Not yet. The here and the now are overwhelming and significant and still somehow marginal. Or maybe we are listening through the filter of our own memories. Anyway, we get no help from teenagers.

We make our way to a train station instead, where a deputy station master is stressing out. The previous train was cancelled and if anyone knows what's going on with the next one, they haven't told him. A crowd is gathering, mostly good-natured,

but that could easily shift. We sense the station master sensing it. He explains that his manager has stepped out and isn't answering his mobile. He has called other stations up and down the line, but no one can help.

We sidle up to the window and ask our question. Hardly out of adolescence himself, he runs his fingers through thin, pale hair. He tells us to wait on the platform. His manager will be back soon and there will be an announcement.

It takes some time, at least an hour, but eventually a crackling voice emerges from a speaker overhead, giving complicated instructions, difficult to hear or understand. A statue of a king marks the center of the city. The center of the capital. The statue is built over an ancient landmark. Distance from the city is measured from this spot. The train isn't coming. Please seek alternative routes.

Mark territory
Outline perimeter at the overlooked

Seek renegade
Weeds in the cracks of the pavement

The counterintuitive
As organizing tool

Alter the inside
This dirty weird old city

Propose freedom in waste zones
Trace ejection pathways to waste zones
Uncover history of waste and zones

Alienation aesthetic
The comfort of gravel pits and car parks and train depots
Wear binoculars in public
Eccentricity hazard
Amateur urban naturalist

Ordinary is extraordinary

Advertising logic wants to play

Satellite view of getting lost

Sweet cache of moments

Massive collecting

Radical catalogue

Nobody looking

Gather together all small citizens

To mark and erase

The extension extends the margin

— “Perimeter Song”

Not hurtling, not drifting: how to describe this movement?

Commuting.

Surrounded by high-rise luxury flats, a mega-mall, the Olympics. A reclaimed power station. Converted docklands. Converted civic buildings flanked by new-build residential blocks and partially subsidized, loss-leading restaurants. Temporary street-food concepts and immersive theater experiences in geometric hives made of shipping containers reclaimed from just downstream. Arcane geometries of green turf and auspicious strips of wildflower meadow.

Listen to the bees.

Jackhammers and the clanging of steel pipes. The sounds are big but muffled behind plywood barrier walls with the occasional rough window chopped out so community stakeholders can watch the building progress. We need shelter and a minute to regroup so we drift into the marketing suite for a residential development and smile vaguely at the estate agent. Then we wander upstairs and change our lives. Press faces against the stainless-steel sinks, refrigerators, oven tops in the model kitchen. Light a scented candle in the model lounge. Slip under the covers in the model master bedroom.

Our eyelids grow heavy, and we tune in to the soft sounds of the softest rock station. Whose voice is that in the space between synths?

We can't stay here.

Outside we are smacked with the density of an acoustic fabric woven from domination and struggle. Regeneration agenda and superstar architect superstar artist public sculpture public swimming pool admission fee. Housing activism. Sink estate. Right to Buy, Buy to Let, Help to Buy, shared ownership. Ownership society. Occupation of the housing office, grassroots community center, community theater workshop. Pop-up mini-pancake stand.

Filled with an unnamed foreboding, we navigate winding lanes and out-of-service lifts and service disruptions and bodies pressed against bodies. A crust of grimy sweat forms in the creases of earlobes. Eventually we get stuck in the middle of a roundabout with traffic stalled on all sides. We feel crowded and scrutinized and we lean against an ornate plinth in the middle of the traffic island. Above us, set upon the plinth, there is a statue of Charles I seated on a horse. We examine the statue and the plinth and, sure enough, we find a plaque announcing that mileage from the capital is measured from this point.

This is it. The center. Right?

And then nothing happens. For a long time.

This isn't working. Whatever this is. We need a new angle or a new approach. Then it registers that we are surrounded by landmarks, sites of concentrated attention, and we can work with this.

The central record office. A neoclassical building with a cobblestone courtyard, eighteenth-century England's answer to the public demand for a public building for the invention and institution of a Public. We could enter this building and consult the birth or the death or the marriage records. We could discover an illegitimacy or a bigamy or a forged will.

We could find order.

Or we could have. The records were decentralized decades ago and are dispersed in different towns and cities in a General

Record Office, a National Archive, Probate Department, Principal Registry, Family Division, Family Proceedings.

Another neoclassical building, this one completed in 1935: the fourth site of the headquarters for territorial policing activities. We could join Scotland Yard and gain access to the channels of a vast bureaucracy. We could marshal forces in a coordinated surveillance operation, door-to-door questioning and chains of evidence and cross-referencing the CCTV footage of one of the most spied-on cities in the world.

No.

A first principle: We are not the police.

So we locate a center for culture, grand entrance stairs flanked by pillars. Our feet tap along marble floors and we navigate school groups and art students until we stop sharp in front of a seventeenth-century painting by the Dutch artist Nicolaes Maes. It shows a woman on a staircase. She is leaning against a wall that separates her from a couple embracing. Her head is angled in such a way that it is clear she is listening in on this couple. She looks out of the painting towards the viewer, with a confidential smile and her finger raised to her lips. An eavesdropper. *The Eavesdropper*. The lady of the house in a white headscarf and apron nearly the same color as her skin, over a red velvet and bronze satin dress. She is spying on domestic servants, surrounded by signs and symbols. A nautical map on the wall. A ring of keys at her waist. A mercantile economy. A nascent bourgeoisie. We are startled into some kind of recognition. Listening in, listening to, listening from. We realize that if we want to find a center we need to position ourselves, figure out our own situation.

We lean back against a wall and it's a bit sticky and the ceiling is low. The temperature is rising, and the air is humid. Small physical discomfort promises intense physical release. The volume gets louder until we can feel it in the base of our spines. Rhythm orders the sounds and movements around us and it is also a channel urging everything to flow together. We run an index finger along the edge of the bar and it's so precise we don't feel it slicing skin until we see a tiny drop of blood. We open

ourselves to the overwhelming contradictions of desire. A sharp edge is preferable to a soft center. We care about bodies, you know. We are bodies.

In a room full of other bodies, we navigate searching rays of eye contact, sometimes accidentally intercepted, sometimes mis-recognized or misinterpreted. We take pleasure in the slip-page, never unwary. The room changes. Property values go up, the lease isn't renewed or the rent increases by 150 percent. A community action group forms, lobbies for the recognition of queer nightlife spaces as cultural assets. A young collective starts a new monthly night south of the river. Elbow under chin over crown of head touching hip joints loosen joints melting in here let's have a cigarette break outside. This is how we lose ourselves. This is how we find each other. This is how we lose our wallets, phones, keys, jackets, heads.

Yes, there is a headache.

*Give me shelter
Give me shelter
Take me home
O-o-o*

*Give me shelter
Give me shelter
Take me home
O-o-o*

*Give me give me
Give me give me
Take me take me
Take me take me
Shelter
Shelter
Ho-o-o-ome
Give me give me
Give me give me
Take me take me*

Take me take me
Shelter
Shelter
Ho-o-o-ome
O-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo

Late or early
Scary weather
Time to go
O-o-o

Time to go
O-o-o

Time to go
O-o-o

[instrumental break]

Give me shelter
Give me shelter
Take me home
O-o-o

Ho-o-o-ome
 — “Love in a Housing Crisis”

Convinced we are closer to something than we ever have been before, we duck into a tiny, picturesque lane surrounded by bookshops and antique stores. On an impulse, we choose one specializing in texts and artifacts related to the occult and go down to the basement level. There are texts connecting elite strength and ancient wisdom to a mythologized Northern Europe and we just about decide we’ve made a mistake except we also find a section of texts on witchcraft and anti-fascist hexes. And then an unassuming how-to book grabs our attention. We ask a silent question and agree.

Fifteen minutes later we feel a collective confidence in our newly acquired capacity for telepathy. A para-acoustic practice. We listen or “listen.” Not thoughts, not feelings, but a sort of vibration that is like audio without being audio. A rhythm, but not quite a song.

The sucking motion of a vent in the outside wall of the bookshop seems to amplify sensations and we rest our heads against it, feeling its gentle tug. Pulsing, expanding and contracting, turning back in on ourselves. We are sovereign or we are bureaucratic shorthand. We’re here for you. We include you, like it or not. We are a membership organization. We are the universal subject, our whiteness unremarkable to ourselves. We say what everyone else is thinking.

Jerk heads away from the vent before we get totally sucked in. Tune in to real noise. What if we had among us the capacity for English (a variety of British and North American dialects), Spanish (Castilian), French, Basque, German, Dutch (Flemish), Japanese, Arabic, Welsh, Farsi, Greek, Portuguese, Thai, Irish, Romanian, Hebrew, Italian, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Vietnamese, Zulu, Catalan, Wolof, Danish, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Russian, Czech, Slovak, Polish, Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese, Haitian Creole, Polish, Korean, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Croatian, Norwegian, Swedish, Serbian, Finnish, Turkish, and Georgian? Could we meet this polyphony? Not cozy not melting pot but thousands of years of movement that is in very precise terms the history of the city.

We hear anxieties and the rich variety of their tones and pitches: roaring, rumbling, whining, wheezing, choking, humming, gurgling, heaving, crushing, grinding, smashing, shattering. We hear the ritual chanting and clamor of incremental calculation and parliamentary chaos and a destination for mobile young professionals. Ideologies of the dispensable or the subsumable. Organized opposition and fringes of social infrastructure.

Dialling phones in a frenzy, willing someone to pick up, desperate to shout to HQ that we’ve found something but nobody’s picking up and it’s starting to dawn on us that our plan to infil-

trate the event from the inside is not going to come together. The center isn't a static destination but something in motion, in relation, centripetal-centrifugal-pushing-pulling. The comforting tones of administrative support are deepening into repetitive thuds and your application has not been successful at this time and a major restructuring and flexible futures and voluntary redundancies and suddenly we are outside the institution, dizzy from the revolving door.

Back to the river. Back in the river.

Something is unwinding and who knows what might get flung out as we whip around. The tide takes us west, out into the leafy suburbs, past a red brick house covered in wisteria where William Morris lived the last years of his life and wrote about this river in his vision of a stateless socialist idyll.

Spirals, spiralling. Out of control. The tide is turning. The flow of the river is reversing. Back out through the city again. Under the bridges, dodging tour boats and water taxis. Back through the estuary, avoiding ferries and oil tankers.

Back to the sea. And suddenly —

Everything becomes clear.

We are listening and whispering, whispering and listening, floating on our backs. We found something. What we heard was unsettling. But we are ready to demand some answers. From her.

One of us and then another and then the rest of us make our way through the roaring surf to stand on the shore. Slowly and with seemingly practiced coordination, though it is a spontaneous and individual decision for each of us, we turn to face the sea, turn to face her. And nobody is there.

She Is Gone and We Are Lost.

(In Transit by Various Routes)

A VOICE: *When the human voice vibrates, there is someone in flesh and bone who emits it. Uniqueness is not a characteristic of Man in general, but rather of every human being insofar as they live and breathe. Where is her voice? Descartes's outline of self-consciousness as the only existing being to enjoy self-determination — the ability to alone decide on its essence or existence — [...] requires the bold articulation and disavowal [...] of extended things, that is, bodies. Where is her body? Letters, gifts, and affection's glossy greetings are important. But the ability to listen face-to-face is even more important, a great and rare art. Aunt Gerda had always been a great listener, aided perhaps by her difficulty in expressing herself and her lack of curiosity.... In essence, Aunt Gerda was not much more than silence. Where is her listening? Desire and knowledge (body and mind) are not a fundamental opposition; rather, they are intricately imbricated and mutually constitutive aspects of political and social life. Situations of desire are the first objects and impellers of intellectual inquiry. Where is her desire? What do we do? I don't know. I — We ... I. We. You and I. For the first time in her life, Aunt Gerda had the sweet and bitter experience of power.*

Overwrought and seeking answers that are not forthcoming, we question ourselves.

What happened?

An event. We were summoned to investigate.

What event?

Seaside, Coast, Border, Crisis, Britain, Infrastructure, Margin, Public, Domestic, Individual. What made all the difference. Extension and rupture and exposure to the break. Exhausted and spent. A brief holiday. An incomplete inquiry we are listening to construct. An open investigation.

Who summoned us?

She did. We had to listen to her voice and wanted to do so. She gave us instructions and we followed them or at least tried. We pulled a lever. The wrong lever. Something shifted. We levelled up and we institutionalized. We went to the center and we de-institutionalized. We emerged and she was gone.

Who is she?

We fell apart. We are holding it together.

Who is she?

She's the boss. She works hard and plays hard and cleans up the mess. She's the last man standing. She may not be in on it, but the joke's not on her.

Who is she?

She moves. Her poetics are lumbering. Hard to approach without special access. Her logic is deadly. She is called "she" by convention, by superstition, for romance, for the convention of romance. She ebbs and flows with the tide, wind in her sails, salt in her hair. She's not unknowable just unknown. What does she do with the drunken sailor? Songs, singing, sung. The volume of her cargo balloons. She is vast. She contains everything.

Who is she?

She is single-minded. She doesn't sleep well, and she eats badly. She has an injury that is a constant dull ache in the background. Her consciousness crackles with electricity. Her behavior is erratic, and she has enemies. She is a shrill hum, like an old tv. She is an ugly snort when your nose is pouring blood and mucus, and your shirtsleeves are already drenched from rain and the raw sewage you were dumped in earlier. She is a nervous laugh that sticks in your throat and turns into a cough. She

is a rattling cough that never seems to go away. She is the blood pounding in your ears. She is the squeal of a car skidding and the grinding of brakes and the impact of metal on flesh.

Who is she?

She is the question we haven't asked yet. She is the red thread. We are the extracts; she is the abstract. She is the method, and we are the madness.

She is gone.

Whoosh!

And what now?

We are the detectives. We investigate the mystery of her disappearance. Search high and low. Seek her out. Sing her songs.

How?

A platform. A launch insists on some ground.

What ground do we have?

Only movement.

So we move. Carry on from South to North along the East Coast.

When does the South become the North?

Above Peterborough. On the M1 at the Watford Gap. Northampton, which is just south of Birmingham, so if not the North, surely not the South. Technically speaking this is the Midlands. The Anglo-Scottish Borders. The tip of the British mainland at John O'Groats. The Northeast Coast is birds and sea air. Blackened beaches, disused industrial structures and slag heaps. Heritage. Herrings. A school of sustainable red herrings.

She is gone.

And we are lost.

An Epitaph for a Man Killed in a Pit Implosion in 1928.

*(Beamish, the Living Museum of the North,
then Seaham, County Durham)*

We search and search and hear nothing of her. The dawn chorus rises up on the beach of a former coal waste dump whose sands are an uncanny sodium-light orange despite intensive clean-up efforts. On the grounds of a stately home where Lord Byron spent a season, a ghostly voice moans about council meetings and shipwrecks. In the car park of an old police house, we glory to the sounds of a pneumatic drill and the coaxing tones of the gig organizer explaining to actual police that it's art! It's art! We pore over Northeast dialect dictionaries and local history pamphlets scrupulously compiled by radical poets. Experiences and encounters ring out on their own but taken together, without her as listener, the shining promise of the miscellaneous collapses into the pointlessness of the arbitrary.

A car boot sale in a field overlooking the sea. We drive past in the morning and there are a few lorries. Later, in the early afternoon, we drive in the opposite direction and there are a hundred trestle tables set up in rows and a thousand people buying jigsaw puzzles and batteries and clothes and toys and perfumes and aftershaves and nail varnishes and e-cigarettes and vhs tapes and vinyl records and furniture and novelty ashtrays

and groceries nearing their use-by dates. Other items whose relationships are difficult to discern but are nevertheless conditioned by economies, macro- and micro-, and regimes of taste and desire and local dynamics and personal histories. We find a DVD that combines home-movie footage of the final days of the last of the area's collieries, a BBC documentary on that colliery, and a collection of clips of brass bands and hand-embroidered banners. There's something here that speaks to our concern but the last time we drive by it's four o'clock in the afternoon and there's an empty field like nothing ever happened.

We need a curatorial strategy. A collection policy. Wrap tongues around words like Living History, Authentic Tales, Thematic Journeys. Smack lips on a tableau of period artifacts. Savour syllables of rusting industrial relics.

We could spend hours like this.

An award-winning British tourist attraction, a welcome development. Shout all aboard, toot a horn, blow a whistle then rest on hard wooden seats of rickety old tram ride round and round and round and round.

We don't know if her disappearance is related to the end of a way of life or if this is just a coincidence. Throw caution to the wind. In the interim, agree to bake biscuits, baste a pheasant, have-a-go at blacksmithing, breed cattle, cure a ham hock, drive a steam train, stitch a quilt cover, stoke a puffing Billy, indulge in a spot of nylon-stocking rag-rug weaving.

Round and round we go.

Circle back. Begin at the beginning. Recap on the essentials. The event of her disappearance is definite. The event of our investigation is ongoing. The resolution of the mystery is an event that is yet to happen. In short, we want to find her and we don't know how.

Meanwhile, the air is thick with ghosts. We add bonnets to our headscarves, petticoats to our skirts, top hats to our tails, monocles to our spectacles.

The thickness is masking her disappearance. Pumped with desire for the past, our grasp on the present slips away.

The tram keeps circling, circling until forward is indistinguishable from backward and we're on a collision course with our own sense of progress. Sat in the front row, our view is of the back of the conductor. Heading straight for us on the same set of tracks, another tram, another conductor. Except this conductor has no face. No front at all. The tram that's heading for us is heading backward, through itself somehow, folded, inside out. We have just enough time to feel sick at the irreconcilability when —

Crash!

A collision of trajectories and timescales.

Time to get off.

If only we could hear her. A pulse like desire runs through our veins.

Shake it off. Tilt ears to the ground to alter acoustic conditions. The space we've been circling has depth. Is a hole.

Go deeper.

End of an arm

End of an era

Find pulse in lost limbs

That rhythm of back then

Cart to carry coal

Cart carried to hole

A deep echo in the ground

Of life lost once lived

Chime of a church bell

Churn of the sea

There was no heating

And they were healthy

Ink tattoos on bone

Leave former shape gone

This scale shift will fix

The poor word buried deep

—“Ode to Nostalgia Politics”

Pitter patter, pitter patter.

Our listening sinks deeper and deeper and we attune to an alternative channel playing on a different frequency to the heritage programming we've heard at the surface. Feet marching, bodies occupying, banners held high. Voices loud with rhythm of slogan in throat from window against defeat. Wear denim jackets, don metal pins for protest, for protection, for social and political organization of workers, for the welfare state, for the love of your neighbor, for the greater good, for now. Hear another reality stretching below calculated visual representations in tourist attraction-cum-museum. Hear hooves pounding in pursuit, batons raising then clacking against plastic shields, the flailing fleshy wobble of arms, voices groaning, legs running now falling, huddling, cowering, fading into the distance. Trodden, now pinned on the ground covered in mud and beaten to death. Sense collective feeling rising, momentum gaining, now sinking with social benefits. Taste war on skin as temperature plummets. Cold ripples poke flesh, goose pimples all over turn taut against bone as aching muscles tire, crack, and disband. Open eyes, let them adjust to dark, earthy tone this far underground. Black particles separate then congeal in new, unusual formations uncontaminated by sun's rays.

Hear details of peopled processes shift infrastructure of power relation and state governance as it alters labor conditions to make extraction transportation connection burn out in process. Feel nature and society interface both wielding and subject to power then crushed when fear of losing grip causes spasm, tremble, panic. Turn to face civil unrest. Shrug economic demise for inevitable relocation. Relentlessly dismantle highly productive, competitive industry, request gentle explaining to existing order.

Notice lack of toleration to security services. Acquire apparatus to activate, at length, full industrial and financial intimidation.

Examine deep scars.

*Get the bucket
And the shovel
What of the dark?
What of the struggle?*

*Tip the power
Return to the beach
From the depth of the pits
A voice will speak*

*Truncheons raise
Be never afraid
Stand heel of tide
As it turns*

*Tip the power
Return to the beach
From the depth of the pits
A voice will speak*

*Tip, tip, tip, O
Turn, turn, turn
Ay, ay, ay, O
From this we must learn*

*Turn to run
Gather up trouble
An armful of hope
Amidst the rubble
Tip, tip, tip, O
Turn, turn, turn
Ay, ay, ay, O
Reform our conditions to earn
— “Tip the Power”*

A hiss of static then the frequency shifts again, this last song replaced with a cheerful rendition of a traditional Northeast English folk song.

Thou shalt have a fishy in a little dishy. Thou shalt have a fishy when the ship comes in. A determined earworm.

We cannot find her. Our current cultural, climatic, acoustic, economic, emotional, social, atmospheric coordinates are just not right. Olives and licorice, ice cream and wool. The pieces don't fit.

We walk down a hill to a newly refurbished marina, funded by EU grant money. Coffees, cakes, sea shanty sing-alongs. Ham broth and dumplings. Plans for jet-ski hire, an indoor climbing wall. The former mining headquarters, which housed the local police station for many years, was recently converted to flats. When the tide is high, waves crash against the concrete defense barriers on the promenade and necklaces on the dressing table swing back and forth. A plaque bearing an iron rendering of a nineteenth-century town plan that was never realized, a kind of memorial to alternative futures. We pause here and find that certain years are chatting and whispering, vying for attention.

The summer of 1977 when membership at the local swimming club at the fitted-out pit cooling pond hit a high of 1,700 people. 2015, the year the Costa Coffee outlet opened, blocking the sea view from the former brothel, overflow morgue, and current Italian restaurant. 1991, the year the last colliery closed. 1854, the year the Seamen's Association commissioned the publication of a poem to raise funds for the town's first lifeboat. 1962, the year of the town's greatest lifeboat disaster and 2009, the year the boat was spotted for sale on ebay. 2007, when plans for a major film studio seemed like a real possibility and 2010, when this seemed like a strange dream. Some year, impossible to know exactly, in the eighth century, when the nave of St. Mary's church was built. 1975, the year she left to go to art college.

What was that again?

But now we're in the cemetery of St. Mary's, running our fingertips over the inscription on a grave. An epitaph for a man killed in a pit implosion in 1928.

How hard not a friend to be near to hear his last sigh.

We pause to strain our ears towards this unheard lament but the sound of wind through long grass sweeps everything else away. In contrast to the granite dignity of the tombstone engravings, there are glossy signs dotted throughout the churchyard aimed at visiting schoolchildren. With admirable frankness, the first of the signs at the church gate sums up what these potential children might expect to find and feel.

Often sad, sometimes scary, and all true.

It's all true, we whisper.

Every ghost story we've ever heard or dreamed about floods our ears. Eerie, grisly, or melancholy ends. Then the flood waters lapse and we overhear a single story written by the poet Bill Griffiths about a young woman journalist from this town, titled "(Ghost Story 4): On Friday Morn." As the tale goes, an old councillor visiting the newspaper offices warns her it's bad luck to write prose on a Friday morning. She ignores him and is haunted for the rest of the morning by a song with no discernible singer. Then the old councillor is felled by a heart attack right before he is meant to sing sea shanties at a charity benefit.

Mouths open.

Hearts race. Throats adjust. Ready to sing.

Note forming.

No.

No note. Just a rising sensation with the opposite effect, pulling us down even deeper.

The Sound of the True North.

*(An Oil Rig in the North Sea, then Aberdeen,
East Coast of Scotland)*

Pressure builds above us. We are, quite literally, in over our heads. Ten, twenty, thirty meters below the surface of the North Sea off the coast of Northeast Scotland. Bodies still intact but how low can we go?

How did we get here?

Memories of the last few days, weeks, months are blurry. Retrace our steps. Seaside resort. Container shipping port. Capital city. Colliery town. And then? A decision. Not giving up, not giving in, but giving over to the circumstances.

We couldn't find her. What else could we do?

Recall further.

There was a man in a suit with a hard hat and pearly white teeth holding a clipboard and smiling in our direction. Exchanging nods and donning high-vis jackets, safety helmets, and thick boots. The sound of a chopper circling overhead, mixing with the rhythmical peep-peep of an oil tanker in reverse. Big ships chugging out to offshore rigs. We were facing the sea. Or, in more accurate terms, a strong wind had slapped us in the face, and we were turning to register our protest only to catch the drift of an unfamiliar voice on the wind. It's all driven by sound.

A sentence like a summoning. The slippery tip of a cold wet finger sliding around the edge of our outer ear. Chills down our spine.

Seems we got a new gig.

Acoustic capacities now stretch from shore to sea and we are sinking, sinking, sinking. A crackle in the ocean static as thousands of smiling yellow rubber duckies float past on an underwater current. Some ride on the back of the corpse of a ventriloquist dummy, belly bloated and entangled with blue polypropylene rope, a waistband of seagrass and fish-and-chip boxes. A swoosh as fly swatters with corporate logos spin round in a futile attempt to squash a seaborne bug in slow motion. Unopened bags of Doritos squeal past, blissfully unaware of their added sea salt content. A trail of oxygen bubbles burst as a group of artist-divers nod hello en route to touch underwater cables trafficking data from shore to shore. A writer inside a high-tech submersible sea pod sinks ever deeper into the blue abyss.

Not quite dead quiet.

Upskilling is always good, but this might be a stretch too far. Creepy-crawly sensation on our skin. Our ears are on overdrive, as though powered by mini propellers. Listen harder. Listen longer. Like fresh conscripts hired to linger at the edge of understanding. We listen on.

Krill converse. A lone bottlenose dolphin chats with a group of harbor porpoises. Minke whales groan, diving deeper to escape the rough vibrational fallout from an overhead propeller engine. The vocal signature of an orca gets muted by interference from a decommissioned oil rig.

We are all momentarily deafened. We hit bottom. We pass out.

And then, astonishingly, we come to and we are aboard a ship, miles from shore. A mug of sweet hot tea is shoved in our hands — back slaps and ah-has all round. We sip the sickly liquid. Our suited friend from earlier returns. He hands out a series of printed graphs showing blobs in shades of blue, red, and green, then delivers an impromptu speech on attuning to

what goes on a hundred meters deep and below. This new boss waxes lyrical about advanced acoustics, about the delivery of real-time images of the subsea bed in full 3D. Something about Scotland being the future. The development of technology to sound out risk and the advent of aides to identify items with no record of having ever been lost. Great. We feel a series of short sharp blows to the head. Tiny, slimy, bug-like devices flop out of our ears. Hearing well and truly hacked. Great. There is a buzzing sensation and when we look down our hands are full of badly drawn infrared herrings.

*Ears attune an
Incline towards
Onwards
Wait*

*Heave then Ho
Leave or go*

*Old harbors
Full of dolphins
Managers and engineers
Proceed with caution*

*Heave then Ho
Leave or go*

*A niggle then a tug
Incline inland
Push then a shove
Shift in ground*

*Heave then Ho
Leave or go*

*Yield to her
Catch again*

*The eternal chase
Goes round and round*

*Heave then Ho
Leave or go*

*And so and so and so
It goes
And on and on and on
They moan*

*Heave then Ho
Leave or go
— “An Inkling”*

A locker bangs shut, and we're all let loose for six weeks of shore leave. A transient population with nothing to do but spend money on peated whisky, local craft beer, tabletop gaming, and signed first editions of Ian Rankin novels. Our ears are being exploited but at least we're getting paid.

Suddenly we have an unprecedented block of free time, and we don't know what to do with ourselves. We wander through the city, shuffling our feet over granite pavement stones and running our hands along granite walls. Dark gray everywhere and then a silver sheen in rare moments of sunshine. Consonants on the wind. The sound of an all-male choir singing hits from the '50s, '60s, and '70s on the ground floor of a department store. The cries of a seagull denied entry to a film house after failing to purchase a ticket. The sound of a master plan. The sound of a city-center, Gothic-themed pub. The acoustic potential of unopened champagne bottles. Coordinates shifting. The creak of minute alterations in tectonic plates. The sound of the True North.

We rent a car, drive out to the nearest Neolithic stone circle. Some mates have tipped us off to weird sonic properties, rumors of psychedelic effects. We walk along a marked path, through a kissing gate and there is a palpable shift accompanied

by a kind of metallic hum. Acutely aware of the extent and accuracy of our acoustic abilities, curiosity takes control even as we notice a marked upswing on our risk registers. A strange mix of independence and vulnerability surges. Then something like overconfidence. We take stock. Who needs the verticality of a company structure? A summoning must work for us, not put us to work. Collective strength will come good.

We gave up too soon.

We fill mouths with ancient pebbles engraved with a history undeciphered. Stumble forward into the circle convinced we need to cut loose the past to gain a present. Prehistoric monumental architecture entices this much-needed movement. Arms stretch then reach in gesture of benevolence; our chant will come but first we need to map out a territory, summon up a schema. Categories, possibly incongruous or incoherent, lie side by side. A trick to track her.

Amidst confusion, a conviction.

We will summon her. She will come.

Let the pipe-bands start up, trauma of upheaval will not heal, only reveal further holes. Hold faces close to stones, turn mouth, then body towards rough outline of ragged rock surface. Open throat. Plug ears. Hum. Energize ancient acoustic qualities. Extend exhale to full length. Shorten inhale. Echoes. Reverb. Reflection. Change the rhythm. Shift the tempo. Physically feel a switch in pitch, in tone. Travel from quiet to loud, dull to bright. Revel in the heightening of musical tension.

We will summon her. She will come.

Shift position to listen from recumbent stone to sounds as they bend and twist from each individual upright stone. Some kind of ancestors are reaching out with something to say. Clear earways with granite echoes. If we cannot hear her, we cannot help. Words written on stone will erode in weather. Ruins left to rot all overgrown with moss and ivy. Squidge ears into resonant cavities. Allow time to intensify timbre variation. Amplify and enhance sounds as they emerge.

We will summon her. She will come.

*Watch pebbles turn pale
White quartz cuts a middle
Gray to blue
Oh, just another nationalist symbol*

*Ice cream at point of collapse
Leave only vanilla remains
A coat once crisp
Now obsessed with domains*

*Walk eroded path
Press ancient stones
As faces pull close
Fresh mouths ready with tone*

*Rock surface hums
Throats open, plug ears
Whole body vibrates
Insert her voice here
— “Insert Her Voice Here”*

Stretched out before us, a series of endless ripples in the ground. The very soil we stand on is reduced to a finely sieved substance like a postindustrial dust. We all know economic redevelopment comes in waves but the frequency of these formations are really something else. Shadows of clouds passing overhead give the sensation we are getting somewhere gaining ground. A gentle breeze blows inland; grains shift from ripple to ridge, their minute transference barely visible in the hazy morning light. We remove shoes then socks to sink in toes then feet then ankles to revel in the texture of tiny particles on skin. A cool dank sensation on the sole of the foot then a sharp shock to the heel, a neat reminder of our weakest point.

An unusual sound as though the very structure on which we stand is shifting. Patterns emerge. Figure forming? Shadows now not just of clouds but yes, the slow formation of silhouettes appear in the sand.

An oil stain on the beach?

A shift in volumes.

An imbalance in substance.

A tilt.

We think about territory, about pipelines passing under hundreds of kilometers of land silently masking real repressions and turbulence. The transformation of carbon in the oil-making process. We can't help but make connections with our earlier experiences in coal mining communities, not least because the North Sea oil industry is in crisis: dwindling reserves but also relatively expensive labor costs or so we hear.

Low, urgent voices articulate a position. Oil is subject to a complex network of partnerships and power relations; energy and democratic politics are closely woven together. All operate in service of translating one form of power into another, leaving the ultimate power in the hands of those who control the state. A network, a web so extensive and embedded it is difficult to imagine the course of correction on the environmental catastrophe, already in progress, that they have created and continue to fuel. This is when we realize, we need to pay attention to power and its transformations.

The sand whips up faster and harder.

Talk about a hostile environment.

We pull elbows to eyes to shield flying grains. We are contemplating invisible yet pulsating networks of power, the silent traversal of national territories and a once-booming fossil economy in crisis.

We take refuge in a luxury portacabin.

Smack hands on table.

Gesticulate wildly.

We need results. We know the investigation is driven by sound. Our sonic sensibility allows us to trace feelings and also facts. The resolution to crisis or means to revolution is yet to be heard. Tuck in tiny seats to stare at an oversize map of the UK.

Open the window. Put on a coat. Wind roars. Window panes rattle.

Listen. We hear:

A high-pitched squeal as a barefoot Norse invader steps on a thistle, alerting sleeping Scottish soldiers; thirty activists sitting down in the main hall of the National Museum of Scotland during the Scottish Oil Club annual dinner; a trawlerman's daughter interviewing communities across Moray to write a play in Doric about hardships faced by fishing families; a request from the Scottish government for a section thirty order to transfer powers needed to stage another vote on independence.

Then, a ping.

Close the window. Check mobile phone.

A YouTube video of a small child demonstrating a coat trick. Coat laid on a sofa, child positioned at coat's neck. A clever flip and suddenly, a coat-clad child. All of this overlaid on a map of the UK that starts to spin: the Shetland Islands become the South; the Isle of Wight neighbor to Norway.

Faster and faster the map spins. Hypnosis or nausea? This is all getting too much.

And then. Amidst the confusion.

A voice.

HER VOICE: You think these isles mark the end of the country?

That voice.

Her voice.

Ripping through absence and suddenly it is everywhere, surrounding us. We can't tell where it is coming from. Syllables repeat and overlap, bouncing off walls that seem to rise up for that purpose. Is it her or is it a transmission? An illusion? An echo? Is there a difference?

HER VOICE: Or are these isles an entryway? Maybe you're right at the very beginning.

Is it her? Have we found her? Where are we? What do we do?

HER VOICE: But it's not enough to look or listen in a different way, is it? What are you going to do?

We remove our coats. Lay each out on the floor, one by one, side by side. Satin lining facing up, armpit holes skyward. Weather-proof outer layers rub gently against linoleum portacabin floor. Collars are up, tails are down. Belts flail to the side. Subtle chink as plastic button grazes ground. Unrecognizable bespoke brand labels all exposed, letters read left to right, upside down. Now, we chant. Now, now, now.

Faces turn to label, arms extend, knees bend. Slide hands into bottom of armpit hole, feel satin slither. Grasp with fingers then tighten rib cage and core in anticipation. Wait for the right wind flow. Feel the pulse and rise of an energy exertion ripple through veins all executed with equal measure of control and caution. Get ready to pump, pull, and raise arms inside of fabric as knees straighten, letting fabric flop over head, neck, back slotting into place.

Coat-clad sonic detectives.

Just the trick.

That should do it.

The ground underneath our feet starts heaving.

We Open Our Throats and We Sing.

(A Cliff Edge)

The plot thickens.

As the echoes thicken, too.

We add our voices, more or less voluntarily, to the growing din.

An echo presumes an origin, an initial tone, a starting shot but it's dark and the ground is pitching and heaving and we're up to our eyeballs in formant frequencies and tuning paradoxes. Where does this chamber begin or end? Our cries are reflected back to us. Diffracted. We are shouting and the shouts are reverberating and each repetition produces a document. With every return, the echoes grow thicker and thicker, taking on more density, greater consequence until finally they demand a filing structure.

/ a report from Sheffield Hallam University on The Seaside Tourist Industry in England and Wales: Employment, Economic Output, Location and Trends arguing that the perceived decline in domestic coastal tourism in the UK since the 1960s is complicated by employment statistics /

And we can just about make out a narrative through-line.

/ and the About Us section from the website of the J.P. Morgan Corporate center established in 1986 in Bournemouth as a regional Technology and Operations hub and now operating as one of a network of strategic hubs allowing us to

consistently meet the unique and evolving needs of our clients — twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, every day of the year /

A story about the 1980s or 1997 or 2008 or 2016.

/ and memos released by the National Archives between Thatcher cabinet ministers in the lead-up to October 27, 1986, “the Big Bang,” when a series of measures deregulating the London financial markets were introduced en masse /

About new economies.

/ and the National Dock Labor Scheme of 1947 (a response to the Dock Strike of 1945) which established the National Dock Labor Board, an administrative body made up of dock workers and employers, and crucially not covering the tiny port of Felixstowe in Suffolk, which in 1967 opened the first container shipping terminal in the UK /

A shift in the struggle between labor and capital. A shift in the configuration of global domination.

/ and a report from the University of Manchester on The Great Train Robbery: Rail Privatization and After that describes the consequences of 1990s privatization of British Rail as a serial shambles /

A story about mineral extraction and fossil fuels.

/ and a prospectus on an MSc in decommissioning oil and gas rigs jointly offered by the University of Aberdeen and Robert Gordon University and introduced a year after oil prices bottomed out /

About margins and borders and edges.

/ a Prevent e-learning module for employees in education, police, fire service, charitable and volunteer, offender management, employment, health services, prisons, local authorities, community, youth justice and other sectors on the risks of radicalization and the role that professionals and practitioners can play in supporting those at risk /

About the sea about listening in on the sea.

/ and a PowerPoint presentation with nebulous images that are actually high resolution 3D acoustic imaging representations of the bottom of the North Sea /

About bodies and being kept alive.

/ and the Home Office Hate Crime, England and Wales Statistical Bulletin of 16 October, 2018, showing a rise in hate crime reporting in 2017 correlating with the Brexit referendum /

About Britain and empire and the end of the world.

/ and the National Heritage Acts of 1980 and 1983 passed as concern for the absorption of English identity into the European Union and a kind of mourning for the loss of Empire gets developed and cultivated /

About her.

She's right on the edge now. A sharp intake of breath because the truth is she doesn't trust herself, but she keeps moving anyway. Fear is a feeling among other feelings. She stops and she's right on the edge and it's true. The wind is pushing her back and the angle of the path is tilting her back and she's not falling. She's on the edge and she's not falling, and she hears the sea, the surf. She sees it, she smells it. She feels the application of temperature and pressure on all parts of her body. She has the perfect view (catastrophe). The sand is in her eyes, it's gritty on her lips and her wings are caught up in the wind. All she can hear is a crunching, grinding, shifting, and a cry of birds, birds, birds. All she can do is sing her way back through the songs she is gathering. Her figure a song for us to elaborate and adapt to other registers, down an octave, changing key. It gets caught in her head a few phrases of a tune she only half remembers.

But we're drowning in paperwork, and we can't get a fix on our position in this luxury portacabin temporary storage facility and the paper tides are rising and the air is getting thinner as the plot gets thicker and thicker and thicker. We stretch our arms, feel the sharp lemon-juice sting of a thousand digital paper cuts, try to get a handle on something and when we do we grip as hard as we can and then twist and then push —

And we're outside.

A breeze is blowing. Or a gale-force wind. On tiptoes we teeter on the edge of a rocky outcrop. Arms outstretched, mouth open, balancing between a sound that is such a constant companion we can barely hear it anymore and a sound that once heard changes everything.

There is a jolt and something shatters. The event breaks up into hundreds, thousands, countless events, a billion contingencies, a cacophony, sheer dissonance, pure noise. Frequencies interrupted and jammed and maybe this is how something happens? But then the noise itself has a pattern, a form. Wants to communicate, gestures wildly, shouts in our ears, and we jump and stumble.

A scramble to regain our footing and we are precariously balanced on the edge of the contemporary, an eroding cliffside that is both crumbling and compiling, ringing out a composition called history or geography. Time and space. The extract and the abstract. The detectives and detection. Organizing tones and harmonies with privatized grace notes and globalized trills and financialized time signatures. A percussion section beating out a logistics revolution against and alongside a nationalist brass band. Other notes further away in distance and time, in different keys, but if we listen long and close, we hear these notes connect our event to other events, and if we manage to shift the tune, seize the rhythm, it will not be through a restoration or a return or a resolution.

We close our eyes, plugging our ears for just a moment.

We open our throats, and we sing.

Her Voice and Other Voices.

The feelings of intense insecurity and impending doom that crisis implies do not necessarily occur only at a single point in time nor only in the context of visible “disaster.”

Jane Nadel-Klein, “Granny Baited the Lines: Perpetual Crisis and the Changing Role of Women in Scottish Fishing Communities,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 23, no. 3 (2000): 363–72.

The description of a sequence of events as a “crisis” simplifies changes in multiple fields, involving various agents, into a unique event, so that a single moment, with a single agent, appears responsible for a collapse of the old order.

Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (Verso, 2011).

What is at stake is the figurability or representability of our present and its shaping effect on political action. In a strong interpretation, the mapping of capitalism is a precondition for identifying any “levers,” nerve-centers or weak links in the political anatomy of contemporary domination.

Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute* (Zero Books, 2015).

Any adequate “answer” to a problem, in turn, will contain a view of the strategic points of intervention — of the “levers” by which the structure may be maintained or changed; and an assessment of those who are in a position to intervene but are not doing so.

Charles Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

When the human voice vibrates, there is someone in flesh and bone who emits it. Uniqueness is not a characteristic of Man in general, but rather of every human being insofar as he or she lives and breathes.

Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford University Press, 2005).

Descartes’s outline of self-consciousness as the only existing being to enjoy self determination — the ability to alone decide on its essence or existence — [...] requires the bold articulation and disavowal [...] of extended things, that is, bodies.

Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

Letters, gifts, and affection’s glossy greetings are important. But the ability to listen face-to-face is even more important, a great and rare art. Aunt Gerda had always been a great listener, aided perhaps by her difficulty in expressing herself and her lack of curiosity.... In essence, Aunt Gerda was not much more than silence.

For the first time in her life, Aunt Gerda had the sweet and bitter experience of power.

Tove Jansson, *The Listener* (Sort Of, 2013).

Desire and knowledge (body and mind) are not a fundamental opposition; rather, they are intricately imbricated and mutually constitutive aspects of political and social life. Situations of desire are the first objects and impellers of intellectual inquiry.

Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York University Press, 1999).

STOLEN VOICES

An Auspicious Start

It's the summer of 2014, a warm day in London on the terrace of the Southbank Centre facing the Thames. Tourists mill, parents of young children watch on as small bodies race and stumble and cry soggy tears. I am here to meet somebody. Part academic blind date, part clandestine encounter. Rebecca wears a bomber jacket printed with an oversize image of a wolf. It is an auspicious start.

We have decided to meet up after exchanging a few emails about a workshop I've just run on eavesdropping as a performance methodology for the Centre for Performance Research and Creative Exchange at the University of Roehampton, where I'm working part-time as a postdoc and the other part of the time doing admin. Separately, Rebecca has also been working on eavesdropping as a practice and though she hasn't been able to join the workshop (she is living in Aberystwyth, in Wales at the time) we decide when she next visits London we'll meet and exchange notes. We've been reading some similar things, it turns out. Adriana Cavarero's *For More Than One Voice*. Salomé Voegelin's *Listening to Noise and Silence*. Jonathan Sterne's *The Audible Past*. Daniela Cascella's *En Abîme: Listening, Reading, Writing*. Eleni Ikoniadou's *The Rhythmic Event*. Kodwo Eshun's

*More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction.*¹ Rebecca has just organized a conference on voice as part of her PhD on aural attention at the University of Aberystwyth. I have just contributed a chapter on eavesdropping to a collection on Voice Studies.² This shared interest in the sonic is paired with a shared background in radical, queer performance and Live Art. We are both working to establish an artistic research practice, seeking forms and structures to support speculative and collaborative thinking in its widest sense. Having established our credentials, we get to it.

We give ourselves one hour. We will spend this hour on our own, listening in at the Queen Elizabeth Hall — the multistory, postwar jewel of a concert hall — taking in foyers, lifts, mezzanine zones, toilets, and any backstage area, dressing room, or secret smoking corner we can find. Then we will return to our now-designated HQ on the terrace and report back. In this hour, the terms of our investigation — what we have come to call sonic detection — are effectively set. We return from our eavesdropping with a sense that we might be able to create a framework together for what we describe below as an ongoing, organized curiosity, both seeking and being open to intellectual companionship.

This book, a collection of artifacts and experiments, records the investigation that we have since developed together. Comprising a detective novel, performance scores, individually writ-

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- 1 Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford University Press, 2005); Salomé Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (Continuum, 2010); Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Duke University Press, 2003); Daniela Casella, *En Abîme: Listening, Reading, Writing* (Zero Books, 2012); Eleni Ikoniadou, *The Rhythmic Event: Art, Media, and the Sonic* (MIT Press, 2014); and Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (Quartet Books, 1999).
 - 2 Johanna Linsley, "The Eavesdropper: Listening-In and Overhearing the Voice in Performance," in *Voice Studies: Critical Approaches to Process, Performance and Experience*, ed. Konstantinos Thomaidis and Ben MacPherson (Routledge, 2015).

ten chapters about sound and performance works that have informed our thinking, and a series of interviews with other expert listeners, dispatched “from the field” by writer Naomi Pearce—as well as this reflection on process—the book is heterogeneous and proposes “sonic detection” as an inductive more than deductive method. As sonic detectives, our collective attention holds open a sonorous space. We develop performance fictions, structured through the plurality of the sonic, endorsing multiple narratives that can be read onto this space. We think about how a body is positioned in relation to sound, making sense of it as though an fx transmitter. We evoke the figure of the eavesdropper as the embodiment of the phenomophile, who lingers longer in listening. While we acknowledge the rich tradition of sound mapping and data sonification that our use of “detection” might bring to mind, our approach is more attuned to imaginative accounts of the here and now, with a particular affinity towards gaps and inventive excesses.³ Rather than a monograph, we think of this book as a polygraph, with a tongue-in-cheek association with lie detectors and other questionable forensic technologies.

The nascent glimmer of possibility we spark at the South Bank takes on concrete form over the next few years. Between 2014 and 2018, we undertake a series of on-the-ground projects that we name *Stolen Voices*: part fieldwork, part spycraft, part experimental community art. The route we take around the UK mirrors that of the fictional detectives we created for “Necessary Note.” Our first official mission is in Bournemouth, on the south coast of England, where we conduct a group of artists from across the UK and Europe on a whirlwind tour of the acoustic textures of this resort town with a thriving financial services sector. Here, we start to think about the particular sonic dimensions of coastal locations, an interest that is solidified by our next major undertaking, a six-month participatory

3 See, for example, Katharine Round, Leah Borromeo, and Jamie Perera, *Climate Symphony* (2015–2020), <https://katharineroundfilms.com/Symphonies-1>.

performance and installation project in Seaham, County Durham. This former coal-mining town in the northeast of England is now subject to a regeneration process, using signifiers of British seaside leisure (sand, sun, Victorian glamor) associated with places like Bournemouth to manufacture the attractions of a past not actually attached to this location. By now, we have developed a (semi-)fictional structure to frame our listening: an as-yet-undefined event has taken place and traces are to be found in the acoustic atmosphere. It's as if an Agatha Christie novel has shattered over a specific place, lodging fragments of aural evidence throughout. It is up to us to find out what is happening.

After Seaham, our next project is in Aberdeen, in the northeast of Scotland. In Aberdeen, as in Seaham, we recruit community members to the team and present our findings in the form of live performance. The city's status as headquarters for British North Sea oil refigures our encounter with the moribund British coal industry, and secures our understanding that this slowly unfolding eavesdrop extends both forward and backward. The "event" we are investigating, we come to feel, has something to do with the sense of constant and escalating crisis that attends the years of our collaboration. The coast, and especially this stretch of coast from south to east to north that we have been tracing — a border by water, the stretch of land facing the European continent, the English Channel and the violent imaginary of anti-immigrant politics, fossil fuel extraction and oil pipelines, fishing policy and the declining welfare of sea creatures, communication technology cabling below the seabed, and coastal erosion and other signs and effects of climate catastrophe — *is* the event. Eavesdropping, a method for illicit listening at the margins, has brought us to this point.

Our final site-based project as Stolen Voices is in Felixstowe, a town in East Anglia, which we pursue with an intuition that we are stumbling towards a solution or resolution, and that we need to make a connection between the east coast of the UK and a wider network of events and infrastructures. Felixstowe is the site of the UK's largest container shipping port, and we work

with a group of composers and sound artists to investigate the sonic implications of global logistics, informed also by the ghost stories of the Victorian writer M.R. James set on these beaches and tales of Edward VIII holed up with Wallis Simpson in the Beach House in Undercliff Road East waiting for her divorce to be finalized in Ipswich. It's an area that has prompted previous artistic experimentation that resonates with our thinking, from Mark Fisher and Justin Barton's 2006 sound work *On Vanishing Land* to Maria Fusco's edited collection on "inscription as method in contemporary art writing," *Who Is This Who Is Coming?*⁴ In Felixstowe the salacious and the eerie meet the brutal, rationalized efficiency of the global shipping industry, one of the ubiquitous infrastructures of contemporary life, which gives us scope to understand that the mode of listening we are developing together works when it is attuned to structures of living at dramatically different scales. Eavesdropping as a method has shifted into the more expansive "sonic detection" which this book has been developed to articulate. As sonic detectives, we are seeking connections between things and gaps in which we might wedge levers for change.

Since 2019 we have moved from a primarily site-responsive practice to working in collaboration on a framework for sonic detection that is both situated and mobile. We completed "Necessary Note," with editorial guidance from the artist/writers Kristen Kreider and Yve Lomax. We released an album, *Stolen Voices 001*, which compiles our new music collaborations with a series of composers, musicians, and sound artists.⁵ We have produced public installations, radio broadcasts, and live performance works for venues ranging from academic conferences to performance club nights to a crime fiction festival, across the UK and in the Netherlands, Spain, Brazil, and the US. In writing this

4 Mark Fisher and Justin Barton, *On Vanishing Land*, Flatlines FLAT001, 2019, MP3; Maria Fusco, *Who Is This Who Is Coming? Inscription as Method in Contemporary Art Writing* (Article Press, 2011).

5 Rebecca Collins and Johanna Linsley, "Stolen Voices," *ASAP Review*, October 3, 2019, <https://asapjournal.com/feature/stolen-voices-rebecca-collins-and-johanna-linsley/>.

book, however, we wanted to document some of the particular activities, conversations, and processes that we developed in our coastal investigation as a way to account for an expanded performance methodology at the heart of sonic detection as a practice, while also indicating the slippery and easily evaporating quality of so much of our work. We're drawn to the inefficiency of performance, its demand for elaborate preparation and fleeting outcomes. Our method for *Stolen Voices* was to practice eavesdropping carefully and intensely, to listen in on other people, other dynamics and relationships, and to take a serious interest in what we heard. When it came time to do something with this listening, though, we didn't want to represent or reproduce conversation, but to construct a suitable hiding place for things we couldn't expect to hold onto. What kind of structure suits an absence? This was a driving question in our work "on the ground," and in this section of the book, we note some of the frameworks for collaboration, performance exercises and sketches, scenes of encounter and happy accidents that formed the material for our production. We revisit the sites that form the backbone to "Necessary Note," but this time, we have tried to make more space for loose ends, unforeseen events, external pressures, and material factors that conditioned our work together as it happened. Looping and reworking are themselves key to the artistic research that we are staging here. We understand our practice as both ongoing and ever-shifting. This is reflected in the form of the rest of this book, too. After this section, each of us heads off on a solo mission, putting our individual thinking about "sonic detection" into conversation with earlier sound and performance practices. The book then opens up, in lieu of a set conclusion, to a range of other perspectives assembled by artist and writer Naomi Pearce, an expert listener in her own right.

Over the ten years of our collaboration, we've moved from precarious positions as artists, academics, and para-academics to more secure employment, Rebecca at the Edinburgh College of Art at the University of Edinburgh, Johanna in the Creative Writing department at the University of Dundee, both in Scot-

land. By situating this investigation within the infrastructural affordances of the higher education sector we have been privileged to be able to apply to competitive funding sources (both internal and external) to fund elements of the research. We have also had access to other institutional benefits such as data repository support, library access, and subscriptions to academic journals and institutional Zoom accounts. Holding permanent academic positions has meant secure incomes for both of us. This accounts, to some extent, for the slowly unfurling character of the work. On the other hand, while our respective institutions have generally been supportive of our work, we insist on extending our imaginations beyond institutions limited in access by tuition and paywalls, structurally resistant to equitable collaboration, and too often sites of exploitation and exclusion. As trade union members, we support fights against casualization, gender and racial pay gaps, and spiraling workloads for academic and support staff. This account of our intellectual companionship — with each other and others — anticipates, we hope, different ways of coming together to listen in and with the public.

An Unlikely Backdrop

The very mention of Bournemouth transports me to a static caravan overlooking the sea, or an amusement arcade with penny falls and umpteen attempts to nudge the two pennies off a precarious ledge. The desire to dig a hole all the way to Australia, a physically demanding project that resets each morning as the waves wash away any progress. The wave machine at the Bournemouth International Centre, my Grandma holding me between her thighs, so taken with the automated motion she barely notices my tiny infant body slowly slipping towards the bottom. Why Bournemouth? Wrong question. How could this begin anywhere else? Bournemouth, a wholly specific place that also stands for something more than itself. British seaside, British summer, a nostalgic childhood landscape ripe for rethinking.

In David Stafford's *Secret Agent: Britain's Wartime Secret Service* — a history of the Special Operations Executive published to accompany a TV series for the BBC — the author gives details on trainee spies released from their HQ in Beaulieu and sent on a two- or three-day mission to Bournemouth.⁶ Here, their skills were put to the test. Inconspicuous message-passing, notes inside newspapers and phone boxes, and above all the ability to

6 David Stafford, *Secret Agent: Britain's Wartime Secret Service* (BBC, 2002).

remain discreet about their purpose in the town. Young female secretaries, according to Stafford, were contracted to make the would-be spies talk over lavish dinners at the nicer local hotels. Many cracked, particularly if sentimental hand-holding was involved. The next day they'd find out their spy days were already over. Benches in the Pavilion gardens became hot spots for discrete interactions and the general population were oblivious. Stafford cites Noreen Riols, a former staff member at Beau-lieu: "Nobody in Bournemouth knew what was going on under their very eyes."⁷

This candy-colored account of secret activity hiding in plain sight against the unlikely backdrop of a seaside resort becomes a reference point for our first experiment working together. We have proposed to run a workshop for performance artists through a funding scheme run by an organization in London called the Live Art Development Agency, and we've also been given some support by Arts Bournemouth and Sound and Music, a national organization for new music. We talk about an as-yet-undefined event and eavesdropping as the method we will use both to conjure and to investigate. We want to experiment with listening together in public and we want to consider the critical and aesthetic potential of the eavesdropper. We believe eavesdropping can tell us something crucial about how we listen, about the role of listening in our everyday lives, and about how listening can be a tool for organizing sensorial experience. So we put together a crack team of agents on the ground. Agents with agency.⁸

FLIRT is a dog-friendly café selling cheesy chips and Victoria sponge cake in an area of town known as the Triangle. The Triangle is the kind of place where you can find sex shops, vegan food, mojito doughnuts, and sticky dance floors. The café's sign uses capital letters in a black retro-style font mounted over a

⁷ Ibid., 44.

⁸ Several years later, we read Brandon LaBelle's *Sonic Agency* and are taken by the idea of "sonic agents" which resonates with our "sonic detectives." Brandon LaBelle, *Sonic Agency: Sound and Emergent Forms of Resistance* (Goldsmiths Press, 2018).

mosaic of tiny aquamarine mirrors that shimmer above the door like sequins. Inside bold colors and a fridge full of cold tropical-flavored drinks are arranged to get you in the mood. This is where we assemble the team. One by one, the participants enter the café. Local artists from Bournemouth and artists from further afield, including Claire Thill, from Luxembourg. Catherine Street, down from Edinburgh, orders a flat white. Greg McLaren gets the Little Flirt Breakfast, Alex Eisenberg picks up a brioche bun, and Johanna is offered “the usual.” We sit at different tables, and, as instructed, nobody acknowledges anybody else. We tune in. Salomé Voegelin, in *Listening to Noise and Silence*, writes that “Listening’s focus on the dynamic nature of things renders the perceptual object unstable, fluid, and ephemeral: unsettling what is through a world of sonic phenomena and audible spirits.”⁹ We want to trouble listening’s habitual usage from confirming the visual, or announcing the presence of a person, place, or thing. We start by listening to our listening.

All sorts in this café, including “Allsorts,” a social networking group for Bournemouth and the South Coast Lesbian community who are having their monthly meetup. Somebody loudly sips the ends of a mango-flavored fizzy drink through a paper straw. Just before total paranoia sets in, at exactly twenty past the hour, I get up and go outside to stand underneath a large umbrella. It is raining, as usual. The others, following the cue, join me, and I say, as an opener, that what we are investigating is precisely how to move beyond listening “as is.” Most of the team nod. Then I give instructions for what’s next: a silent walk together to the Pavilion Theatre, located in the pleasure gardens where the trainee spies used to hang out. We walk, feeling lightly conspicuous. A rehearsal room in the theater is our temporary headquarters (HQ), and Richard Whitelaw, program director of Sound and Music and a qualified counselor, leads an initial training session on active listening. The gardens are immaculate. Putting the tip of your tongue to the roof of your mouth gently opens up the ear canal and, when in dialogue with

9 Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence*, 12.

someone, puts you in the listener position. Forget filling awkward silences with more words. Richard runs through possible health and safety issues associated with eavesdropping. Try not to get caught. Try not to strain your ears.

Visual references to eavesdropping build up. Polonius behind the arras before getting stabbed by Hamlet: a case study for the dangers of listening in the margins. Athanasius Kircher's mid-seventeenth-century drawings from the publication *Musurgia Universalis* depicting a series of thick twisty tubes buried in walls designed for those in the Royal Court to eavesdrop on those in the plaza.¹⁰ As Joel Stern and James Parker point out in their publication on eavesdropping, Kircher's "funnels replicate in architectural form the physiology of the ear — a twisting and turning canal leading to a hypersensitive center."¹¹ An image of a cave someone once visited while on holiday on the island of Sicily that resembles a teardrop and is called the Ear of Dionysus; it has acoustic properties able to amplify the voice up to sixteen times. As we look at these documents, a large hot air balloon bobs outside the window. It is tethered to prevent it floating off into space. Tourists and language exchange students peer from the wicker basket. An orange glow from the heat source illuminates their faces as the vessel is buoyed into the air. The balloon is sponsored by J.P. Morgan.

We send the team out into town on various missions, and Johanna and I share the first of many cream teas that we will have over the years, this one at the Arlington hotel. Johanna wears a scarf embroidered with abstract scenes and I wear a blue-striped round-neck top with three-quarter-length sleeves. Johanna's hay fever is eased by the coastal air and my skin is salty. We muse on the systems and structures and architectures we have encountered that facilitate eavesdropping and get us listening. The opportunities are everywhere. The Russell

10 Athanasius Kircher, *Musurgia Universalis* (Ex typographia haeredum Francisci Corbelletti, 1650).

11 James E.K. Parker and Joel Stern, eds., *Eavesdropping: A Reader* (City Gallery Wellington, 2019), 31.

Cotes, a lavish seaside villa turned museum and art gallery with a circular hole in the first floor and contoured bench in plush red velvet directly below that allows you to listen to those on the floor upstairs. Toilets in Harry Ramsdens piping nonstop seagull sounds. A car park playing bagpipe music on a loop from speakers in the stairwell. Beales department store, with an overhead public address system announcing what is cheap. St. Peter's church and chapel, where somebody is playing the piano. As much as listening motivates and frames the work we're here to do, we're also learning something about dialogue. We reflect on how we think this is going and strategize about how to handle the next session. There's something recursive about our conversation. We return to different moments from the morning, tease them out, handle them, try to understand what they yield. We sift through a series of postcards depicting typical scenes from Bournemouth. Golden sands with pale blue rowing boats, brightly colored beach huts, the pleasure gardens again, the lights of the fish-and-chips restaurants at night. The team has written early impressions on the back, attempting — in red, blue, and green biro — to stretch an ear to what is already happening. Tiny canvases for documenting the atmosphere.

The overheard always escapes total capture, and this is absolutely ok. We're interested in the overspill. Tina Campt urges in *Listening to Images* to “not only read [...] images, but also to listen to the sonic dimensions through which they also register.”¹² She is writing about the discarded cutouts of identity photos taken at *Gulu Real Art Studio* in Northern Uganda. In our very different context, we are compelled by her proposition to seek “sensorial relief” in the documents she studies, lifting the haptic, historical, and affective backgrounds of photographs. In our search for clues we embrace sensorially orientated approaches, aiming for an intermingling of the felt, the thought, the consciously registered and the buzz in the background. It becomes interesting to ask what conditions our listening — what makes our listening possible? To what extent are these conditions audi-

12 Tina M. Campt, *Listening to Images* (Duke University Press, 2017), 23.

ble and how much do we have to acknowledge the unheard and the just out of reach?

Bournemouth, and other British seaside resorts, call to mind faded glamor and sepia-tinged memories of a time before cheap air fares. Tourism is still important to Bournemouth's economy, as domestic travel remains more accessible than international. Even more important for local employment, we discover through our work here, is the finance sector. As we walk away from the beach, the pier, the gardens, we notice banks, insurance headquarters, and financial institutions. The Vitality Health Insurance building and the Nationwide building. Open plan offices visible from the street. Tony Norfield, a former London banker, writes about Britain's transition from the role of "workshop of the world" in the early industrial period when cities like Manchester and Liverpool dominated the manufacturing landscape.¹³ Norfield documents the nation's late shift from colonial superpower and "lender to the world" to its role in the neoliberal era processing the transactions of international creditors.¹⁴ While Britain has not been the dominant global power for decades, its position in global finance gave it outsize influence on the day-to-day operations of world politics in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. London is synonymous with Britain's international finance industry; in Bournemouth, we find businesses that service this industry. The us mega-bank J.P. Morgan established a corporate center in the town in 1986 (the same year that the Margaret Thatcher-helmed government enacted sweeping financial deregulation), where employees conduct technology, operations, and corporate and client services.¹⁵ When we were working in Bournemouth, in 2014, J.P. Morgan was the biggest private sector employer in the county of Dorset. Two years later, in the wake of the Brexit vote, national newspapers paid close attention to CEO Jamie Dimon's

13 Tony Norfield, *The City: London and the Global Power of Finance* (Verso, 2017), 378.

14 *Ibid.*, 114.

15 "J.P. Morgan in Bournemouth," *J.P.Morgan*, <https://www.jpmorgan.com/about-us/locations/emea/bournemouth>.

pronouncements about the fate of this corporate center and its 4000 workers as a kind of bellwether for the future of the industry — and for the UK — more broadly.¹⁶

Parts of Bournemouth contain some of the most expensive real estate in the UK. An article in the local press about a bank branch in one of these areas grabs our attention. There's a pilot scheme to make the bank accessible only to customers earning £75,000 or more. Anyone else would need to pay a fee of £19.95 for counter services, or is offered the option simply to use another branch. In defense of this decision a spokesperson for the bank is quoted as saying: "not everyone in the world is equal."¹⁷ Running from June 2007, the experiment came to an end in November 2015. The bank cited the end of the lease on the building and an increasing preference for online and telephone banking services.

The structure for the three-day workshop is hub-and-spoke. The team goes out and eavesdrops and then comes back to the temporary HQ to debrief. During one of the "missions," Johanna and I pitch up in a hotel bar, a space unafraid of a pink wall or flowery upholstery, an ideal setting for a murder mystery. We've let slip our location through cryptic clues and occasionally a team member comes and sits down at our table. As we sip tea from

16 Tim Wallace, "Jamie Dimon Admits 'Not Many' JP Morgan Jobs Will Leave UK in Major Brexit U-Turn," *The Telegraph*, April 4, 2017, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2017/04/04/jamie-dimon-admits-not-many-jp-morgan-jobs-will-leave-uk-major/>; Iain Withers, "JP Morgan Begins Telling UK Staff Being Relocated to the EU," *The Telegraph*, November 15, 2017, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2017/11/15/jp-morgan-begins-telling-uk-staff-relocated-eu/>; and Iain Withers and Lucy Burton, "JP Morgan Boss Warns It Could Move 4,000 Jobs without Brexit Progress," *The Telegraph*, January 25, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2018/01/25/jp-morgan-boss-warns-could-move-4000-jobs-without-brex-it-progress/>.

17 "Poor Returns for Rich at 'Bank for Rich:' HSBC Branch Launched for the Well-Off near Exclusive Sandbanks Area of Dorset Closes — Because It Didn't Have Enough Customers," *Daily Mail*, August 25, 2015, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3210949/Poor-returns-bank-rich-HSBC-branch-launched-near-exclusive-Sandbanks-area-Dorset-closes-didn-t-customers.html>.

china cups, we consult on the loss of sounds once made by now-obsolete technology, extinct animals, or languages no longer in use. We also get an earful about the duck race happening on the stream in the pleasure gardens, organized by Rotarians who had convened at Bournemouth International Centre the previous evening. Late that night, we all head back to the Triangle to dance at a series of gay nightclubs, matching ears to limbs, the foundational scene for a thousand queer adolescences all brimming with glitter and badly applied eyeliner.

In this first iteration of our project, we start to develop a repertoire of exercises, ideas, and vocabularies that we will return to over the next ten years. A key issue is translation of the experience of listening into something transmissible to others. We are often asked about the ethics of eavesdropping, and we discover that our questioner assumes that we are recording other people's conversations without permission. With the team in Bournemouth, we learn how much more interesting it is to think about compositional strategies that are not about accurately representing or replicating eavesdropped experience. Rather, to borrow from Voegelin once more, we treat sound "as sensorial material."¹⁸ The organization of sensorial experience is not trivial, nor straightforward. Detritus accumulates, from words scrawled on the back of postcards, napkins, chip packets, and brown paper bags into spatial arrangements. On the wall at HQ, there is a map of the town complete with tiny red ladybug push pins that mark what we think we know about where we are. We assign categories and names to all the local landmarks indicating outposts from this part of the mission. We ask the team to think about what might have been left behind. About the negative space informing the thrust of this ongoing mystery. The overheard gets evidenced in three dimensions. The sound of decision-making manifests in the moving of chair legs as they scrape on the floor, the whirl of tiny projectors being set up, and the creasing of corrugated cardboard folded into peep

18 Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence*, 108.

holes. Greg and Aisha have found the body of a dead crow and wrapped it in a coat. They bring it to the group, a visceral shock.

Time for a plot twist.

After letting the sea breeze influence our thoughts and stir our feelings, we agree it is time for the final move of this opening act. We gather around a series of odd shapes sketched out with masking tape on gray rectangular tables clustered in the center of the room. Each team member slots their evidence into one of the demarcated zones, animating this as they see fit, with relevant media, props, found objects, words, or voice accompaniment. The names Juliette, Ju-lie-ette, Nancy, Nancy ring from a poetic recording created by Emma Bennett. A mound of sand and a silver skeleton mask resembling an eerie island sit next to a video assembled by Sebastian Hau. No sharing ceremony is complete without some form of celebration. We hand out glow sticks and with a synchronized snapping action bid each other adieu in neon pink, yellow, green, and orange.

A Line Tangent to a Curve

It's difficult to make a straight line in the sand. The top layer is sodium-orange and I want to displace as little of it as possible as I trace a figure, a line tangent to a curve. Encounter, contact, and release. I try to instantiate a feeling on the surface in front of me. When we look together at the shapes we've made, we realize that they look like ears.

There are about fifteen of us scattered across Blast Beach. We are trying not to anticipate our own reactions. We are testing systems for making meaning together. This used to be a coal waste dump, absorbing the colliery spoil tip of four local mines in this northeastern part of County Durham, making it one of the most polluted places in the world. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the mines closed, and funds from the UK National Lottery enabled a major clean-up operation, in partnership with local community interest groups, district councils, and land-owners, including the National Trust. The lingering oxidation and the lurid orange is a reminder. There is a biting wind. It is 5:45 a.m. The sun is rising and so is the dawn chorus. Rebecca wears a big, fluffy hat and Johanna is wrapped in an oversize tweed shawl. We haven't planned to be theatrical but we haven't planned not to be. There are cryptic instructions written on little pieces of paper and we offer these to the other participants as invitations to frame their listening. We are eavesdropping on

the birds in an area now renamed the Durham Heritage Coast, in a town called Seaham.

Mariam has asked us to write a story. We're going to make a piece of performance together, based on our evolving eavesdropping method, now tuned to Seaham. She tells us that we'll throw the story away, but we need something to throw away. Mariam Rezaei is a composer, DJ, and experimental turntablist with a background in improvisation and radically political aesthetics. This iteration of the project has received funding from Arts Council England and the team has grown. We are also working with two creative technologists, Lalya Gaye and Stu Herring, who are building an interactive listening post we call the Eavesdropbox. We have two producing partners: Helix Arts, an organization in the nearby city of Newcastle; and East Durham Creates, funded by an Arts Council England initiative called Creative People and Places (CPP). CPP is in part a response to a survey that identified areas of "low participation" in the arts in England.¹⁹ The ideas and techniques, and the overall vibe, that we developed in Bournemouth will be the basis for a context-responsive production in a new location. We've used the phrase "temporary community of listeners" in our application and now we have to figure out what that means.

It means, in part, rejecting the deficit model of participation, which assumes that some people simply don't have the skills necessary to make or appreciate art and culture. Leila Janovich writes, "a key finding from CPP was that people are engaged in all sorts of things and that the participation deficit is a myth, but under-resourced places are a reality."²⁰ It means paying attention to the already-happening. It means not knowing in advance what's going to happen, but not fetishizing not knowing either. It means thinking about composition: the composition of a piece

19 "Creative People and Places Projects," *Arts Council England*, <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/creative-people-and-places-o>.

20 Leila Janovich, "Creative People and Places — An Experiment in Place-Based Funding," *Journal of Art & Communities* 9, no. 2 (2017): 129–47.

of music, the composition of a series of performed actions, the composition of a group of people, the mineral composition of a cold beach at dawn. It means the possibility, but never the guarantee, of meaning. It is meaning that just about comes into focus, but doesn't quite, and when we try to voice it, we lose it entirely. It is meaning that we tease out together over a long time that has no existence except that teasing out and so can't be condensed or represented, except maybe — a little — in auspicious symbols. A line tangent to a curve. A triangle. A spiral. A hole.

We start to talk about "the fiction." Being in the fiction. It's shorthand for getting into a mood or working up a sensitivity to an atmosphere, and it's different from narrative or storytelling. Rebecca lives nearby now, in the outskirts of the city of Durham. Johanna still lives in London and stays in Rebecca's spare room. We get into the fiction all around Seaham. A cascade of attention. Sweeties in jars and optimistic fishing nets, on a coastline to which wildlife has only just started to return. War memorials with nicknames. A greengrocer shouting into the street and playing pop music from the 1960s. Doors within doors. Olives and licorice, ice cream and wool. A dialect dictionary. Home movie of the last day of Seaham Colliery, and of the next day. Inside out-ness. A hallway, and then the event of a building imploding. Rail tracks leading to nowhere, existing to demonstrate the previous existence of rail lines. EU grants and a twin town in Germany. A history told in swimming costumes.

A piece of public sculpture, a rendering etched in bronze of a town plan of Seaham drawn up by the architect John Dobson in 1828, commissioned by the third Marquis of Londonderry. The monument is entirely virtual, a memorial to a future that never happened as Lord Londonderry's financing only actually extended to commercial infrastructure: a harbor and a railway connection to facilitate the movement of coal. The poet Bill Griffiths, who lived in and wrote about Seaham, refuses to allow that Londonderry can even be credited with those developments. He writes that "while the third Marquis may have had good qualities, conceiving, creating, developing and controlling do not

seem to have been among them.”²¹ The idea for the harbor, the practical work, the organization of finances, and the manual work all came from other people. Londonderry’s contribution was his name. As Griffiths states: “Aristocrats, I suggest, seldom create history single-handedly.”²²

We send Mariam “dispatches” in the post, and then we gather in her studio at The Old Police House in Gateshead, near Newcastle. We work fast. Mariam encourages us to devise on our feet. The Eavesdropbox that Lalya and Stu have made is a refurbished vintage computer running custom software. It is nestled among the other computer stations in the Seaham Public Library and it has yielded a pile of text as library-users feed it their sonic impressions. This text becomes a score, along with other sounds, anecdotes, gestures, and rhythms derived from the community workshops we’ve run, the formal and informal conversations we’ve had, and the eavesdropping we’ve done. With Mariam, we write the lyrics to a song. It starts out as a pastiche of a jolly folk tune and then we try to inject it with the strangeness of specificity. We borrow a line from the poet Byron’s response to a season spent at Seaham Hall: “Upon this dreary coast we have nothing but county meetings and shipwrecks.”²³ There is a reference to the story of a fatal injury caused by a fish bone and to a lifeboat disaster from the 1960s with an odd coda in 2008 when the lifeboat itself showed up on eBay.

The pace sharpens the edges of our attention, makes us acute. At the same time, other durations and timescales for collaboration start to unfold. The fragments of story that we’ve written together help us develop a shared syntax and though it’s slow going, it’s also absorbing and feels like new territory. We start to keep notes for another project—a fiction, a “sonic detective novel,” somehow motivated by an elusive “her” we have yet fully

21 Bill Griffiths, *The Mythology of Seaham: Review of Tom McNee’s Local History Publications* (Amra, 1994), 4.

22 Ibid.

23 George Gordon Byron, Baron, “Letter 211. To Mr Moore. Seaham, Stockton-on-Tees, February 2. 1815,” in Thoms Moore, ed., *Life of Lord Byron with His Letters and Journals*, Vol. III (John Murray, 1885), 146.

to understand. Deborah Kapchan's questions for listening as "speculative method" are relevant: "How to listen to our own listening with others? How to practice the translation of listening, as well as listening-as-translation? And how to write sound knowledge into being?"²⁴ For Kapchan, "sound knowledge" is embodied, emergent, intuitive, and tuned to alternative systems for knowing less hierarchically. In our own inchoate experiments, we are seduced by the possibilities for sounding writing and prompted to find routes between the creative and critical. Jane Rendell's "site writing," too, which argues for and practices the situatedness of all writing — including the writing of criticism — helps us reflect on our position as eavesdroppers even as we seek methods to account for our capacity to lose ourselves or mistake each other for something else.²⁵

Sonic detection is a method for braiding together the unknown and the ever-present. We are wary of the stultifying cliché but attuned to undercurrents that disguise themselves as received wisdom. Living and working in the northeast of England, the consistent backdrop is the legacy of coal-mining, though discontinuities and ruptures inflect the character of this legacy. British industry originated what Andreas Malm calls "fossil capital," noting that Britain accounted for 80 percent of global CO₂ emissions from fossil fuel combustion in 1825 and 62 percent in 1850. Malm argues that, "The origins of our predicament [climate crisis] must be located on British soil."²⁶ The northeast coast of England is where Britain's early industrial activity was densely concentrated: shipbuilding, iron ore extraction, steel manufacturing, and, of course, coal-mining. In *Carbon Democracy*, Timothy Mitchell makes connections between how coal

24 Deborah Kapchan, "The Splash of Icarus: Theorizing Sound Writing/Writing Sound Theory," in *Theorizing Sound Writing*, ed. Deborah Kapchan (Wesleyan University Press, 2017), 4.

25 Jane Rendell, *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism* (I.B. Tauris, 2010).

26 Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming* (Verso, 2016), 13.

is extracted, transported to machines and burned, and wider political dynamics.²⁷ The process is peopled: Laborers are the initial interface between nature and society. Workers wield and are subject to power.

During a workshop, a member of the Seaham eavesdropping team, a retired social worker, says that the Tories crushed the North in the 1980s because they were afraid: afraid of the unions, afraid of the working class, afraid of loosening their grip on power. Seumas Milne describes a “spasm of class panic” starting in the early 1970s as the British ruling class trembled in the face of rising social unrest.²⁸ He argued that the fate of the mining industry cannot simply be shrugged off as economic demise or as part of the inevitable relocation of nineteenth-century industries to “developing” countries. The relentless and rapid dismantling of the industry revolved around power and class. In 1972, the National Union of Miners (NUM), with their goal to tip the balance of power away from employers and freedom of capital, were a threat to British capitalism, so the Conservative party, security services, and the wider governmental apparatus strategically set about breaking the NUM. This goal licensed the Coal Board to use all modes of industrial and financial intimidation available to shift back the balance of power in the sector and also brought about a redrafting of the national “war plan” to focus on handling what Thatcher famously dubbed “the enemy within.”²⁹ Long term effects from the battle over coal have left deep scars in Britain. Poor infrastructure, poor health services, and levels of unemployment way above the national average prevail in former mining communities.

It is Jean, Jac, and the other Jean who decide that we will listen together to the sunrise on Blast Beach. Jean Spence, Jac Howard, and Jean Lowes all grew up in the area and now, with other

27 Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (Verso, 2011).

28 Seumas Milne, *The Enemy Within: The Secret War Against the Miners* (Verso, 1994), 333.

29 *Ibid.*, 337.

local artists (most retired from other jobs and careers) run the East Durham Artist Network or EDAN. They are grassroots, self-organized, unfunded, and quietly ambitious. The group occupy a refurbished public toilet facility on the high street of Seaham, at the end nearest the sea. When we meet to talk about hosting one of our eavesdropping workshops in and around the space, they give us copies of the publications they've created, one of which includes a poem by Jean Lowes about a local resident, Rocky, who sleeps in sea caves during the summer. She agrees for the poem to be included in the performance score we create and for it to be published here. EDAN hold deep local knowledge and they are generous with sharing. Among other things, they put us in touch with Ani Sandwith, a local singer who performs as part of the gig night we organize. We imagine how centralized initiatives like Creative People and Places would be transformed if they identified organizations like this — not “professional” but embedded in extensive networks — and funded them directly. We're keen to support with our own funding through things like venue hire though this feels ad hoc and inadequate.

The gig night sells out. The venue is a café called Roobarb 'n Custard, named after an animated children's series from the 1970s, and it's packed and casual and buzzing. Ani sings original songs, and David Curtis and Robert McBlane — who we connected with via the Seaham Music Academy — play intricately orchestrated northeastern folk tunes on the flute and guitar. Rebecca, Johanna, and Mariam segue into *Stolen Voices: Seaham* from behind a long table set with bird whistles, toy walkie-talkies, a mixer, microphones, sheets of annotated paper. Next to the table, there is a snare drum. We make sounds together, attempting to articulate something that might obliquely resemble another thing we may have rubbed up against. This is the most difficult part to account for. Pleasure is hard to write about and it feels great moving in these coordinated and improvised ways. A word like “conjuring” is good because it gives some sense of the something-from-nothing self-image of live performance, and also its eccentricity and almost adolescent intensity, always

at risk of collapsing into silliness, embarrassment, or wounded defensiveness. It's hormonal, what we do.

At every stage of our work together, there's the possibility that this might be it. The money might run out, the interest might dissipate, the energies might be better directed elsewhere. We have a running joke that we practice at train stations and other partings:

Well, I'm sure we'll run into each other again.

Oh no, absolutely.

Let's definitely meet up soon.

Let's definitely do that.

A pause.

And then, we never saw each other again ...

It was so weird.

I never ... We never ...

We did all that work and then ...

Ok comrade. Good luck.

Art Is the New Oil

The roof of the Beach Ballroom is burnt orange. It stands out against the gray sky and equally gray buildings of Aberdeen. Johanna wears a tartan scarf and an oversize gray wool coat with large pockets into which she buries her ungloved hands. Rebecca wears a long storm-wear puffer jacket — the hood up so her face is barely visible — and black insulated leather ski gloves. We are walking along the seafront. White foam and arctic seagulls whirl overhead and there is a strong smell of seaweed. A couple with their dog casually run a metal detector over the sand. The wind cuts to the bone while the sun splinters through the clouds offering spectacular lighting effects and zero warmth. Oil tankers bob on the horizon, and the helicopters that service them compete with the waves for sonic prominence. We head away from the sea to a café and order a full Scottish breakfast from a waiter in an apron with chunky brown leather straps.

This is the furthest North I've ever been.

When driving on the M1, a motorway that either originates or terminates in London, depending on your perspective, “the North” is signaled by the Watford Gap service stations — facilities confusingly located not in Watford (a town in the South) but just north of Northampton (a town generally classified as the Midlands). Clichés and caricatures: Northern resentment or fierce independence or pride or disaffection. Scotland some-

times seems to fall off the map entirely. Ysanne Holt and Rupert Ashmore, who write about Northern British “edgelands,” present a more complex picture of how Britain, as a geographical entity, has “northern edges [which] inevitably invite enquiry — an edge is, most obviously, where one thing becomes something else.”³⁰ We add this to what we learned from reading Krista Ratcliffe, who excavates the etymological roots of the term “eaves,” suggesting “edge,” “margin,” and “border.”³¹ The border or margin at the edge of understanding is the very thing the Stolen Voices project set out to investigate.

Finally, we’re onto something.

Aberdeen, in northeastern Scotland, is the Granite City, so called because of the uniform gray stone that glints silver when there’s sunshine. We run eavesdropping workshops in a downstairs room at Seventeen — formerly the much-cherished One Up records and now a temporary arts hub set up by Aberdeen City Council — and at the Anatomy Rooms, an arts facility in the former dissection unit of Aberdeen University. A snapshot: Maja Zeco is in Correction Wynd using her oversize hat as a cover. Bea and Mark Dunsmore are on Union Street categorizing sounds. Stéphanie Vandem and her daughter are noting sounds of certainty and sounds of choice as they linger between Jo Malone and New Look in the Bon Accord shopping mall. Rebecca and Johanna are running acoustic consultations from Slains Castle, a Gothic pub in a former church with original carved wooden paneling in a low lit, Dracula-themed interior. Someone writes a score for eight sonic happenings around the city. We are stretching our ears across the square mile of the city center. A peregrine falcon fights off crows to snatch a pigeon. Another crow challenges us to a staring contest in St. Nicholas cemetery. Crow wins. A seagull, caught on CCTV footage, gains entry to the Belmont cinema without a ticket.

30 Ysanne Holt and Rupert Ashmore, “Introduction: Layered Landscapes,” *Arts* 9, no. 1 (2020): 31.

31 Krista Ratcliffe, “Eavesdropping as Rhetorical Tactic: History, Whiteness, and Rhetoric,” *JAC* 20, no. 1 (2000): 90.

In a warm and nicely appointed portacabin we meet Murray Dawson, who introduces us to a group of media-savvy teenagers at the Station House Media Unit (SHMU). Murray is the founder and chief executive of SHMU, and since 2003 he has been working, alongside his wider team, with residents in the seven regeneration areas of the city on radio and video production, print, and online publications. Their work is fiercely supportive of disadvantaged communities and includes an employability program for offenders, both pre- and post-release. We work with members of the youth media group, who are enthusiastic eavesdroppers. Their ability to hold a collective silence, extend the reach of their aural attention, and storyboard sonic events in chunky felt tips is impressive.

The eavesdropping activities frame the performance we are planning at the Lemon Tree, a neat theater/bistro-style venue run by Aberdeen Performing Arts, our cultural partners. We've received a grant from Silver City Stories, a one-off cultural festival funded by Aberdeen City Council, the University of Aberdeen, and Visit Aberdeenshire. The work will build on the compositional techniques we developed with Mariam Rezaei in Seaham, but will be more text-based. We are developing performance personae, casting ourselves now as the "sonic detectives" who investigate the still-unidentified and ever-compiling event. The performance is simultaneously billed as an "eavesdropping cabaret," "an experimental sonic fiction," and a "gig night." Somehow it will be all of these.

I run my finger over engraved letters on a series of wooden plaques tacked to the wall at Marischal College, the former anatomy department of the University of Aberdeen. Ske-le-ton Cases. Mor-tu-ary Shoe Lane. Mu-se-um Rail Ca-ses. Shell Rooms. Lec-ture The-at-er. X-Ray Room. Ass-is-tants Room. Store Cellar. We add these to our text score. We divide the words into syllables and rehearse saying them together in a synchronized format. We look for more text fodder, find a list on a sign outside The Tolbooth Museum, housed in a former seventeenth- and eighteenth-century jail:

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

LOCAL HISTORY

JACOBITES

ARCHAEOLOGY

WITCHCRAFT

It puts us in mind of a sign outside a shop in Seaham, advertising ice cream and wool. We work to get our tongues and lips and rhythmic capacities around language that doesn't quite fit.

In Stewart Home's experimental pornographic novel *69 Things to Do with a Dead Princess*, Anna Noon, the central character who lives in Aberdeen, engages in sexual acts with a ventriloquist dummy and a man named Alan, or possibly Callum.³² The majority of these acts occur in the many ancient stone circles to be found in Aberdeenshire. Interwoven into *69 Things* is a novel-within-the-novel, also titled *69 Things to Do with a Dead Princess*, in which the corpse of Princess Diana is taken around all the stone circles in the same county. We're interested in the novel's layers, its dogged proceduralism, and its intertextuality. Throughout, Home references Ann Quin's 1964 novel *Berg*.³³ In *Berg*, the central eponymous character plots to kill his father, a vaudevillian ventriloquist whose prize possession is his dummy. The action is set against a seedy, claustrophobic, and grubby seaside town, a version of Brighton in the southeast of England (where Quin grew up and tragically died). *Berg* poetically and experimentally pivots around the seaside as site for a real or imagined mystery, weaving conscious and unconscious desires into a complicated web concerning voice and agency. Aberdeen's seaside "imaginary," by contrast, is — as Home notes — fundamentally inflected by its relation to the oil industry. Everyone we speak to, from taxi drivers to tourist board officers, has a connection to oil.

32 Stewart Home, *69 Things to Do with a Dead Princess* (Canongate, 2003).

33 Ann Quin, *Berg* (Calder, 1964).

Our performance is developed and performed in 2017, when the city is in the midst of a crash attributed to the rising costs of exploratory drilling and the drop in oil price per barrel, which saw jobs in the industry reduced by one third and tax revenue bottoming out. As we write this, the Conservative prime minister Rishi Sunak has recently announced controversial plans to authorize Rosebank, an unexplored oil field some eighty miles west of Shetland that is estimated to contain up to 300 million barrels of oil. Project supporters claim this to be a solution to UK energy security by avoiding high cost imports from overseas. This is despite clear evidence that it severely hampers the net zero climate emissions target for 2050 (Scotland's target is 2045) and decarbonization targets to counter the climate crisis, and despite the knowledge that the majority of Rosebank's energy will be exported to those willing to pay the highest amount.³⁴

An article in a local newspaper claims "Aberdeen's future as the oil capital of Europe may be at stake, but don't underestimate the power of the arts."³⁵ We ride the coattails of a series of initiatives that seek to put culture at the forefront of the city council's agendas, explicitly framed as an alternative to the fossil fuel economy. The festival that has commissioned us is one such initiative, and we're invited to give a presentation at SPEC-TRA, a large-scale light festival. Aberdeen's cultural calendar also includes a jazz festival and a street art festival and the city has invested about a billion pounds in cultural infrastructure, including in a major refurbishment of its art gallery (which reopened in 2019) and an events and conferences venue just outside the city center. A local contemporary dance organization

34 Matthew Taylor, "UK Government Admits Rosebank Oil Will not Be Kept in UK to Boost Energy Security," *The Guardian*, January 4, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/jan/04/uk-government-admits-rosebank-oil-will-not-be-kept-in-uk-to-boost-energy-security>.

35 Rachael Cloughton, "After the Oil Boom and Bust, Could Art Save Aberdeen?," *The List*, March 29, 2022, <https://list.co.uk/news/after-the-oil-boom-and-bust-could-art-save-aberdeen-6558>.

adopts the slogan “Art is the New Oil.”³⁶ We know that the work we make will need to respond to this context, and we’re thinking, too, about the progress of the wider investigation, from our encounter with the legacies of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century coal industry in Seaham, to our immersion in oil and its twenty-first-century consequences. *69 Things to Do with a Dead Princess*, with its paranoid logic of association and transformation, is a useful model as we try to fashion a structure that mimics, in some ways, the relationship between carbon and culture. We also turn again to Timothy Mitchell, who describes how in the oil-making process, carbon undergoes a transformation:

The transformations involve establishing connections and building alliances — connections and alliances that do not respect any divide between material and ideal, economic and political, natural and social, human and nonhuman, or violence and representation. The connections make it possible to translate one form of power into another.³⁷

The distinctive processes of the oil industry and the controlled set up it requires fundamentally shifted the effects of mass strikes by workers. With coal, the physical labor involved in mining had, quite literally, placed expertise in the hands of the worker. The deployment and distribution of the oil industry differs quite significantly since it leaves workers on the surface and mobilizes a system of networks putting production expertise into the offices of engineers and project managers. In considering how to absorb and account for this shift, we read James Marriott and Mika Minio-Paluello’s *The Oil Road: Journeys from the Caspian Sea to the City of London*, which traces the physical, political, and cultural connections underpinning a particular oil pipeline, using the conventions of the travelogue.³⁸ This helps

36 Citymoves Dance Agency, “Art Is the New Oil,” *Facebook Video*, October 5, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10155529435966233>.

37 Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy*, 7.

38 James Marriott and Mika Minio-Paluello, *The Oil Road: Journeys from the Caspian Sea to the City of London* (Verso, 2013).

us conceptualize a relationship between narrative and networks, and bodies at multiple different scales.

We develop a text score to house the traces and connections we have determined in our eavesdropping workshops, found language, and other noted items from our time spent in Aberdeen. It's important to us, though, that this work should come through our bodies, and we draw inspiration from artists who use performance, voice, and rhythm in compelling ways. Rebecca shares her enthusiasm for the work of choreographer Alma Söderberg and performer Jolika Sudermann's *A Talk*, which uses the rhythm of everyday speech, including "errs" and "ums" and the finishing of each other's sentences.³⁹ Johanna brings in the work of Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion, particularly *Both Sitting Duet*, a complex and precise dance work drawing on sequences of physical gestures — translations from the written score of the violin and piano piece *For John Cage* by Morton Feldman — that can all be performed while sitting down.⁴⁰ We talk, too, about the extended vocal technique of Elaine Mitchener, whose experiments at the edges of what a voice can do are deeply imbricated with a politics of postcolonial memory.⁴¹ Rosa Lambert uses the term "kinetic textuality" to describe the interlacing use of "speech and bodily gestures" where the emphasis in performance is put on "a text's rhythmic qualities in enunciation."⁴² We write and practice the text score anticipating how to share the material with a live audience. We add, delete, repeat sections to develop the composition. We use italics to denote gestures. Highlighters to split up syllables. None of these techniques are new to those working with text scores but

39 Alma Söderberg and Jolika Sudermann, choreographers and performers, *A Talk*, Het Veem Theater, 2011.

40 Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion, artists and performers, *Both Sitting Duet*, 2002.

41 Elaine Mitchener, <https://www.elainemitchener.com/>.

42 Rosa Lambert, "When Text Becomes Movement: The Kinetic Quality of Writing," in *Creating for the Stage and Other Spaces: Questioning Practices and Theories: Essays and Contributions from the Third EASTAP Conference 2020*, ed. Gerardo Guccini, Claudio Longhi, and Daniele Vianello (University of Bologna, 2020), 413.

this becomes part of our method. Part of our means for exploring the relational space generated by the voice and sound, what Adriana Cavarero perhaps means when she describes “a reciprocal intention to listen, one that is already active in the vocal emission, and that reveals and communicates everyone to the other.”⁴³ We are listening to our listening, putting attention on each other’s fricatives and plosives, and the rhythmic timing of speech delivery. We rehearse and rehearse and rehearse. Repeating phrases, synching our syllables. We develop a sequence with bendy neon orange gear ties and fish hooks and music stands. It is really weird.

*We lifted bodies from their graves
We used our strength
We used our wits
We sold them onto Doctor Moir
So he could cut them into bits.*⁴⁴

An earworm from Aberdeen-based psy-folk band The Kitchen Cynics “The Resurrectionist’s Song” burrows deep into our cochlea and resurfaces at inopportune moments. Johanna emails Alan, the main and only permanent member of the band, to ask if he wants to play at the gig night in the summer. Lucky for us he says yes. At a second-hand bookshop that smells of home-cooked soup we meet Pete Stollery, the composer we are commissioning to make a new audio work for the event at the Lemon Tree, which will become an eight-channel immersive electro-acoustic composition that also acts as a kind of resolution of the investigation we perform. Pete is fascinated by the connections between sound and place and has a deep sound-mapping practice. He gives us a short demonstration of how his spy watch functions and tips us off about the Easter Aquhort-hies, a stone circle alleged to have particular acoustic properties, which we promptly set off to visit.

⁴³ Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice*, 5.

⁴⁴ “Resurrectionist’s Song,” track 4 on Kitchen Cynics, *A-Tune-a-Day Selection* Vol. 3, Les Enfants Du Paradiddle enf 113, 2017, MP3.

The cheapest rental car turns out to be an automatic Audi with blacked out windows. I have to read the manual just to get us out of the car park. Aaron Watson describes how, during a visit to the Easter Aquhorthies in 1994, he noticed that sounds made from within the circle were echoing and ricocheting between other stones.⁴⁵ The particular set up at the site features a recumbent stone on one side of the circle. This, as Watson notes, creates an alcove and contributes to the resonant acoustics you experience. Rebecca feels a bit skeptical. Johanna is optimistic and keen to lend an ear to the ancient granite. Upon arrival, we each spend time leaning against every monolith in turn. Before long we are humming and singing and chanting and reciting poetic phrases. We are wrapped in an inexplicable acoustic fabric.

Some time passes.

Watson, with John Was, has written at length about neolithic monuments as sensory technologies, suggesting they remain “reactive spaces, fueled by the actions and thoughts of people within.”⁴⁶ Johanna is whispering the end of a ghost story to the recumbent stone. Rebecca is having an inter-ancestral encounter. A crow caws. The story ends. Johanna and Rebecca try out a full repertoire of vocal effects on the stones. Hair ruffled. Shoes and socks discarded. Car keys and wallets and phones and shoes and socks abandoned. The sun is setting over the tops of the tallest trees. We look at each other. We tame stray hairs with our fingers. Straighten coats. Push spectacles back on noses. We gather wallets, car keys, shoes, socks, phones. Johanna receives a voicemail on her phone. We joke about it being a message from the neolithic people who want their sensory technology back.

We find refuge in the warmth of the mahogany veneer interior of The Grill on Union Street, where whisky bottles vibrate and shift with the movement of an elderly lady serving behind the bar. Time to distill our thoughts. When the time comes,

45 “Acoustics at Easter Aquhorthies,” *Dr Aaron Watson*, <https://www.aaron-watson.co.uk/easter-aquorthies>.

46 John Was and Aaron Watson, “Neolithic Monuments: Sensory Technology,” *Time and Mind* 10, no. 1 (2017): 3–22.

we're relieved to find a ladies toilet, albeit installed only in 1998, a mere twenty-three years after women were given permission to enter the establishment under the 1975 sex discrimination act.

Sheet Ghosts

An oversize chandelier hangs in the lounge area of the old Orwell Hotel in Felixstowe and individual segments of crystal vibrate gently, reacting to the weight of those who walk on the floor directly above. There is a large crack running the length of the ceiling. A group of elderly people, friends from school, are having a reunion in a far corner of the room, discussing the past and comparing present physical states: a hip joint has given out, bones creak, a heart valve operation, a revised relationship with gravity. The lounge adjoins the main reception area where the receptionist deals with a complaint about a missed wake-up call and a mixed-up room number. You can never please everyone.

Nimmi Naidoo reads a magazine article about how to disinherit your children. Donna McEvitt, Georgia Pazarloglou, and Ode Aseguinolaza sit on chintz sofas or on the deep-pile carpet. Johanna and Rebecca are keeping time. It's a kind of role-playing game. This group of composers and sound artists are adopting a "sonic detective" persona for seventy-two hours and we are sitting in silence for thirty minutes in this hotel lobby in order to shift, just a bit, our sense of each other and our purpose. The hotel is Victorian and has seen better days, but wears a faded glamor that we have come to associate with our medium. Another artist, Emily Godden, has taken her binaural recording device — shaped like a pair of disembodied ears — into the lift.

A man in a suit asks her what she's doing. She tells him she's in a sonic detective novel.

"I'm here on business," he says.

Felixstowe: logistics and ghosts. The port of Felixstowe is the largest shipping container port in the UK. Something like 40 per cent of all container traffic comes through this port. If you are in the UK, you more than likely encounter objects that have passed through Felixstowe as an everyday occurrence. If you are in a sonic detective novel, you might think buddy caper, competence porn, a well-oiled machine. Questions like: what could possibly go wrong? Remote systems of control, not always manned. The journey in and the journey back are of equal importance. Margin of error. Felixstowe is also the backdrop for one of the most famous works of Victorian ghost story writer M.R. James, "Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You My Lad." The story follows Professor Parkins, an Oxford academic firmly and touchingly committed to combating irrational belief, on a holiday visit to a thinly disguised "Burnstow." He is forced to revise his position on the supernatural when something enigmatic and awful takes possession of his bed sheets.⁴⁷

Seven of us walk silently on the esplanade with manicured gardens, recently refurbished, up the steep hill on our right with the crashing North Sea on our left. Our motto could be: attention's dividend is detail. Runners participating in a charity fundraiser. Flyers in windows about a dispute with the council regarding the ownership of beach huts. A blue plaque marking the house where Wallis Simpson stayed while her divorce was dealt with in nearby Ipswich, and where the then-King Edward VIII went for clandestine visits. *Flashback '67*, an exhibition of ephemera documenting the 1960s pirate radio scene, including Radio Caroline, broadcast from a ship offshore from Felixstowe to avoid UK regulations. Attention's dividend is a kind of frothing of promising hints on top of an overwhelming sense that *something is here to be known*. In M.R. James, following this

47 M.R. James, "Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad," in *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (Book Club Associates, 1976).

sense leads to punishment, what Mark Fisher — who engages with James and Felixstowe to develop thinking about the “eerie” — describes as a “fateful” fascination with an outside that is “always coded as hostile and demonic.”⁴⁸ For us, it sometimes leads to disappointment or distraction and often to a retrospective revision of what it is we think we are doing. We are not afraid. Not always.

The 1968 BBC television adaptation of “Oh, Whistle and I’ll Come to You, My Lad” is austere, with sparse dialogue and a masterful performance by Michael Hordern as the protagonist — a catalogue of ticks, social awkwardness, and arrogance. While the central conflict in the TV program continues to be found between the rational and the supernatural, it also touches on labor and visibility. It opens with a long shot of two housemaids making up a bed with severe and efficient strokes, the pounding and smoothing of fabric a percussive soundtrack. Horden’s Professor wanders through the guest house grunting and sighing with vague unawareness of the work that happens around him, only moved to speech when philosophizing with another male guest. In the terrifying final sequence, the same sheets that were tamed by domestic workers in the opening scene now rise of their own volition. The ghost is an irruption into plain sight of everything that usually goes on in the background. “Oh no,” Hordern groans. “Oh no.”⁴⁹

On an inauspicious residential corner a few streets back from the shore, we ask the group to stop. We tell them to take five minutes and dial up the attention a notch higher. I probe the contours of my self-consciousness, feeling conspicuous in stillness, and find a giddy pleasure in the creation of a moment that feels subtly set apart. Later, we show the group footage from a webcam a local resident has attached to his roof, live-streaming this corner twenty-four seven at personal expense and obscure purpose. The images are grainy and difficult to make out, but

48 Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (Repeater, 2017), 72.

49 Jonathan Miller, dir., “Whistle and I’ll Come to You,” episode of *BBC Omnibus*, feat. Michael Hordern, aired May 7, 1968 on BBC.

there we are. We've inserted ourselves briefly into someone else's conspiracy theory. After the five minutes are up, we carry on walking until we arrive at the View Point Café, the closest a regular member of the public can get to the Port of Felixstowe. Chips and little twists of salt and sachets of ketchup. Jacket potatoes, topped with baked beans or tuna mayo. Toasted cheese sandwiches. An all-day full English breakfast. Coronation chicken. A bacon sandwich. Tea and instant coffee. Burnt espresso. Chili con carne on white rice. We are transfixed by container ships slowly cresting the horizon and coming into port, ships the size of football fields, ships that contain multitudes, contain everything. Just-in-time manufacturing: the production philosophy where goods are made in response to demand, the manufacturing process extends beyond a single factory, and manufacturers have increased flexibility to operate when and where conditions are most favorable. It implies a violent shift in power relations between labor and capital.

Felixstowe is the most deliberately chosen location of the Stolen Voices project. Sonic detection is a method that happens in concentrated bursts with long periods of conversation and reflection in between. There is a story we have started to tell ourselves, between key coordinates, about a seaside resort underpinned by the finance industry; regeneration, heritage, and the rise and fall of the coal communities in the north of England; North Sea oil and Scottish independence. It feels like a logic is starting to emerge, about the coast and how it *works*. Container shipping, its ubiquity and invisibility, now preoccupies us. A missing link. We work with an organization called SPILL in Ipswich, a town just northwest of Felixstowe, whose artistic director Robert Pacitti is a long-time supporter of the project. SPILL joins with Snape Maltings, a music organization founded by the composer Benjamin Britten, also on the Suffolk Coast, and the Live Art Development Agency, who supported our initial Bournemouth investigation. We will run a developmental workshop with a group of composers, immersing them in "the fiction" and in the process completing some kind of circuit of inquiry. To prepare

for our Felixstowe adventure, Rebecca and Johanna devise a game for ourselves. We write a list of things we want to think about, based on our sense of where we want “sonic detection” to lead us next:

- the sea, destruction
- the sea, profit
- the sea, pleasure
- storage
- ownership
- loss and preservation
- the defense and penetration of borders and boundaries
- logistics
- planning
- convalescence
- heavy-lifting
- the admiration of danger
- waste
- paperwork
- automation
- distance from headquarters/the regional office
- temporary operations
- interruptions
- chain restaurants
- family-owned restaurants
- concept restaurants
- processes that break down in the implementation stage
- arrivals and departures
- big boats
- business relationships
- guaranteed delivery times

The game we then devise requires a remote operator and an agent on the ground. The remote operator inputs a series of instructions into an automated email program, meant to guide the on-the-ground agent on a walk from the Felixstowe train station to the port and back. First thing to go wrong is the tim-

ing of the emails. Instead of a seamless delivery at natural intervals, they bunch up like city buses — nothing for ages and then loads of them arriving at once. Then my old cell phone runs out of battery. Twenty minutes ago, I was standing alone in a car park, separated from the port by grassy sand dunes, wearing scratchy wool ear warmers and an inadequate rain jacket, wondering what would happen to me if I had a heart attack at that exact moment. Now, I've taken a detour from the planned route and I sit in a Costa Coffee, plugged in but out of reach. It's freezing outside and actually I hate being told what to do, even when I've helped come up with the system. The break feels like a gift.

To complement this on-site preparation, we also read about the swift advances of the shipping container industry on the European market following the successful maiden voyage of a metal box transported by ship from Newark, New Jersey to Houston in 1956.⁵⁰ While the first ships docked into harbor ports in Rotterdam and Bremen, modernized to accommodate the dimensions required, the UK struggled to keep up, seeking finance for necessary construction works. Further delays for the British government came from the waterfront unions whose stevedores in Liverpool, Southampton, and Tilbury — traditional cargo ports — carried out extensive strike action to protest against the threat of automation. In a narrative about the triumph of this logistical revolution in the UK, the then-tiny port of Felixstowe looms large. The small size of the land and its dock meant it had been excluded from the National Dock Labour Scheme, set up by Parliament in the late 1940s to represent the interests of dockworkers, in response to the Dock Strike of 1945. In 1967 the port, managed by the Felixstowe Railway and Dock Company, struck a deal with Sea-Land service to carry out the installation of a container crane and wharf reinforcement to make Felixstowe competitive. Strike action delayed and curtailed container traffic through Tilbury while Felixstowe, by

50 Marc Levinson, *The Box: How the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger* (Princeton University Press, 2008), 1.

1969, between frequent sailings to the North Atlantic and services over to Rotterdam, was handling 1.9 million tons of cargo.⁵¹ The port was built on land purchased by Trinity College, Cambridge in the 1930s. Trinity is the richest of all the Oxbridge colleges, with real estate assets valued at close to a billion pounds.⁵²

The history of trade unionism is wrapped up with docks. As the British Empire grew and common land enclosures forced agricultural laborers to abandon rural areas, many sought employment at city docks where they also found miserable working conditions. The London Dock Strike of 1889 was the largest instance of labor unrest of the period, by far, with 100,000 workers taking part. At issue was the practice of “plus” money—bonuses paid to workers who unloaded cargo more quickly, a practice that pitted workers against each other. The strike marked a major victory for organized labor not just in the resolution of the dispute but in demonstrating the capacity for industrial workers to mobilize at mass scale.⁵³ The struggle over the incremental value of time would persist, though, and it was this struggle that container shipping aimed to blow out of the water (so to speak) through automation and the distancing of human labor from the loading of goods to the operation of machines that do the loading. Fisher describes the Felixstowe port as “eerie” because of the absence of visibly human activity, which “facilitates the illusion of a ‘dematerialised’ capitalism.”⁵⁴ The ironic implication, of course, is that these ghost ships are heavily material and always bear the imprint of human hands.

Fisher starts his project on Felixstowe at the port and ends at Sutton Hoo, an archaeological site where a sixth- and sev-

51 Ibid., 276.

52 Xavier Greenwood and Richard Adams, “Oxford and Cambridge University Colleges Own Properties worth £3.5 Billion,” *The Guardian*, May 29, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/may/29/oxford-and-cambridge-university-colleges-own-property-worth-35bn>.

53 Roy Mankelov, “The Port of London, 1790–1970,” in *Dock Workers: International Explorations in Comparative Labour History, 1790–1970*, ed. Sam Davies et al. (Routledge, 2017).

54 Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 77.

enth-century cemetery and early medieval ship burial were discovered. Both, for Fisher, exemplify a form of “eeriness”: a contemporary, mechanized eerie and the eeriness of ancient unknowability. Our axes for charting the same territory might be “noise” and “music.” We generate a noisy surfeit of detail eavesdropping on the area between the Orwell hotel and the port, and then we decamp to rural serenity at Snape Maltings, submersed in virtuosic music. Vocal groups and chamber orchestras rehearse in studios around us, repetition into skill. The Felixstowe team is making beautiful, virtuosic work, too. Emily shows us a virtual reality simulation of the inside of a shipping container, made surreal with oversize SPAM containers and a reproduction of the carpet from the Orwell Hotel. Ode produces a ten-minute electro-acoustic composition mixing field recordings, piano music, and samples from Edward VIII’s abdication speech broadcast on the radio in 1936. Our position on the relation between the sonic and the musical is ambivalent, our affinity for the amateur and democratic shading into our sense that form is what gives fuel to the imagination, and allows us to think differently. Noise helps us nuance this ambivalence. Marie Thompson argues that noise is “ubiquitous, constitutive and primary.”⁵⁵ She reworks the opposition between signal and noise; for Thompson, noise doesn’t just block transmission, but is its initial condition — “with no noise, there is no transmitted signal.”⁵⁶ This idea of a necessary fuzz that is the material of meaning is so central to our investigation that we could call it noise detection. The clanging silence of global logistics that becomes audible when the circuits break. The ghosts in the bed sheets that lie stiff and still until they can’t help incorporating, calling attention to themselves.

Noise into tracks. The Felixstowe workshop is where we start to conceive of a Stolen Voices album. We compile pieces that artists have made during each phase of the project — Emma Ben-

55 Marie Thompson, *Beyond Unwanted Sound: Noise, Affect and Aesthetic Moralism* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 18.

56 Ibid.

nett in Bournemouth, Mariam Rezaei in Seaham, The Kitchen Cynics and Pete Stollery in Aberdeen, Ode Aseguinolaza in Felixstowe, and a new track that Rebecca and Johanna make with the sound artist Jan Mertens that we call “Postcards from the Ongoing Investigation” — and we press them into vinyl. We find sketches from the seventeenth-century Dutch artist Nicolaes Maes, a study for a series of paintings of “The Eavesdropper” (which the writer and sound artist David Toop writes about in his 2011 book *Sinister Resonance*, and which also makes an appearance in “Necessary Note”), and the designer Michael Ovaska translates these into an album cover.⁵⁷ Adam Matschulat mixes the album and Flora Pitrolo produces. It’s the most tangible artifact we have so far and the most audibly polyvocal and multi-perspectival.

Noise into song. In the novel we’re writing — this strange tangent that both distracts us from our performance work and has become the context for it — we’ve hit on the idea that the sonic detectives are carried along the narrative in pursuit of songs. At first we define this broadly: paragraphs are songs, quotations are songs, historical facts are songs. This doesn’t work, though. We start writing lyrics and find that the little packets of verse do the work of catalyzing and redirecting narrative energy, so we keep them.

Noise into objects into lyrics into preliminary schematics into software into collaboration into struggle into tempo into order into timing into transport into everything that’s keeping us alive and alert and everything that’s killing us slowly and then all at once. We are at the Felixstowe train station, which we might in retrospect cast as a terminus for the Stolen Voices project, the final alighting point in our last location. The station has a strange aspect. The single platform is like an island, separate from the station building, which is about thirty yards away. In 1967, when the container terminal opened, there was a problem. An 1898 reconfiguration had left the Felixstowe docks without

57 David Toop, *Sinister Resonance: The Mediumship of the Listener* (Continuum, 2011).

a direct line, and trains heavy with freight from the ships were having to enter this town station instead and then reverse. In 1970, the line to the docks was reinstated, and the town service was reduced to a single platform, which was then amputated from the station itself to make more space for cars. The station building, having been granted protected status for architectural interest in 1980, was converted to shops. You can just make these out from under the green awning of the platform.

The Seagull of History

We spend a decade working together, telling each other that the work is to pay attention, to register the textures of crisis as we encounter them, to note the contours of a fragment. 2014–2024. Border politics, populism, racist police violence, fire, flood, earthquake, war, displacement, pandemic, food security, cost of living, privacy and surveillance, energy and fuel, sexual freedom, sexual assault, healthcare, housing, sea levels, air quality, sewage levels in open water, infrastructure, disinformation, mental health, journalism, attention, the humanities, the arts. Brexit, Trump, COVID-19, Gaza, Syria, Ukraine, Australian wildfires, trans panic, Yarlswood detention center, #MeToo, Twitter. A UK government report announces that the British land mass is tilting — the southern part of the island is eroding into the sea while the northern part is building up. Coincidentally, we both move to Scotland.

The resolution to the mystery of the as-yet-undefined event will, we think, be found somewhere between land, air, water, and the exhilarating possibility of unstable boundaries. We each choose a mythologized geological edge. Arthur's Seat, which frames Edinburgh and calls to mind the melodrama of kings and magical mists. The white cliffs of Dover, rising in dramatic columns over the English channel. Rebecca walks up Arthur's Seat and Johanna tackles Dover's white cliffs. We keep our ears

tuned to detect something we don't quite understand: a phrase that sounds like "the seagull of history."

Near the beginning of "Necessary Note," we quote anthropologist Jane Nadel-Klein, who writes, "The feelings of intense insecurity and impending doom that crisis implies do not necessarily occur at a single point in time nor only in the context of a visible 'disaster.'"⁵⁸ We read Nadel-Klein because of our interest in UK coastal cultures: She is thinking about Scottish fishing communities on the North Sea, which have faced decline or extinction since the First World War — communities existing in a state of "perpetual crisis." The particular sense of crisis Nadel-Klein investigates is related to the catastrophic depletion of fishing stock which is occurring globally, but she argues that the way crisis is experienced, and the responses it produces, are "culturally and historically constituted and locally instantiated."⁵⁹ This crisis mode also follows on from much longer-term precarity due to threats such as "disaster at sea, empty nets, rapacious middlemen, the predations of seals and the vagaries of the market," and social isolation resulting from outside stigma. In her study, Nadel-Klein offers a description of crisis as a condition with duration, depth, and location, which can threaten and also produce identity, individual and collective.

We also quote Timothy Mitchell, who writes that "[t]he description of a sequence of events as a 'crisis' simplifies changes in multiple fields, involving various agents, into a unique event, so that a single moment, with a single agent, appears responsible for a collapse of the old order."⁶⁰ He is discussing the 1973–1974 oil crisis in the US; we read him out of interest in the paradigm shift from coal-powered to petroleum-powered energy and cite him throughout this section. Mitchell examines the public framing of crisis and the ways events exceed it, pointing to the hawkish stance of the US government on a Soviet-endorsed

58 Jane Nadel-Klein, "Granny Baited the Lines: Perpetual Crisis and the Changing Role of Women in Scottish Fishing Communities," *Women's Studies International Forum* 23, no. 3 (2000): 364.

59 Ibid.

60 Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy*, 173.

peace deal in Palestine in the wake of us defeat in Vietnam; the development of the institutions of neoliberalism, such as think tanks like the Cato Institute, with its connections both to the oil industry and to the ideological program of limited government intervention and private market self-regulation, and the emergence of “the environment” as a distinct field of political concern. This complex sequence is masked by the rhetoric of crisis, but also underlies the descriptive force of “crisis.”

Arthur's Seat.

I see it, feel it as a symbolic rift within the country, within the island. I want to see past that. A projection of newness, the contemporary strained and held back by an archaic feudal architecture. Kings will be Kings and they will have their seats and yours too. Move on.

Now there are many of us marching together in a crocodile shape wearing long Victorian coats with laptop bags. Words in capitals like INSURANCE, LIABILITY, FINANCE, flash before our eyes. CROFT AN RIGH.

Halfway up(ish). We will climb these gray brown rocks. We will not climb these gray brown rocks. Snails cling to the incline.

“Are we going back?” [insert breathing sounds] We push on.

A small child points out the churches as we climb. The churches sink lower and lower behind us into the distance. A kestrel hovers mid-flight, wings outstretched ready to catch its prey.

I thought I'd be at the top. Now I'm going down. This is a complex arrangement of peaks and troughs. And it is so, so brown.

You're on the wrong route.

Take Radical Road

Arrival time

17 mins

Lat 55° 56' 43.8' N Long 3° 9' 38.3' W

The wind holds me up or holds me back. I'm suspended or doubled or more than.

The river, of course, the river is here and the rigs. And a Bernedoodle. Hello old friend. Now we are all relaxing on the grassy green slopes. Everyone (not everyone). Salty sweat taste. Plane overhead. Vehicle reversing. I lie back. Arms stretched. Sun beating down. I'm dizzy. This island is spinning. My view of a smaller island reminds me I'm on an island. Languages all around. I've found a panama straw hat made in Italy.

I run down with a coffee and sandwich mantra. I see a twelfth-century church and on a whim decide to pop in. I read about the stained glass windows named the Pinkerton windows made in memory of Alan Pinkerton's wife, born in Duddingston. Pinkerton, born in Glasgow (the parish) moved to America in 1852 to set up the Pinkerton Detective Agency, now called Pinkerton Securities. Jaw on the floor, I make for the bus stop where I find two teenage boys smoking. I walk to the next bus stop which is opposite the Duddingston forge.

We put pressure on the contingency of this work or friendship or working relationship. We do it because we want to and we feel like it. We do it for a fee. We do it to feel luxurious. We do it for the chat. We don't even know each other that well. Friends of friends. Colleagues. Strangers. Someone we've heard about. We goad each other on. We give ourselves permission to use a phrase like "intellectual companionship." We don't want to give this up.

We send each other news stories about seagulls, stories reporting on outraged citizens angry at the aerial hordes. One story from an Aberdeen newspaper quotes a local councilor who says that arctic seagulls are the size of a small dog. We watch seagulls wherever we go, unable to resist anthropomorphizing or at least noting why it's tempting to assign these birds human characteristics and motivations. The Cheeky Chappy. The Brute. Seagulls as the personification of appetite, not greed because they don't rise to the dignity of sin, just drive, just hole. Then the way they transform over water. Pigeons, equally maligned, have the positive aspect of peace. For seagulls, it's freedom.

I write an offhand comment about seagull selfhood online and the theater academic Alan Read responds, recommending the section on seagulls in Walter Benjamin's short essay "The Nordic Sea" and Samuel Weber's reading of this section in his book *Benjamin's -abilities*. Benjamin is watching a flock of seagulls in a melancholy state of mind from a boat off the coast of Norway. He tracks their movement and the complex crossings they make in the air, and narrates his own transition from observer to a more mysterious position from which he "can no longer describe their procession."⁶¹ For Weber, this is an example of Benjamin's practice of writing images as a way to extend the project of philosophy from the construction of abstract, universal knowledge to a philosophy of experience, which Weber describes as *singularity*. He compares the seagulls to Benjamin's famous reading of Paul Klee's drawing *Angelus Novus*, of the angel of history "who sees the rubble of history piling up in front of him, as he is carried — or blown — into the future."⁶² The difference, in Weber's reading, is that the gulls "do not move forward, or even back, they do not progress or regress, but merely fly high and low."⁶³

We circle and cycle, in the investigation, in the fiction, in the listening. Well, I'm sure we'll run into each other again. Yes, absolutely. Let's definitely find a time to meet again. We notice, on a number of occasions that, uncannily, our intellectual companionship has led to the sharing of rhythms, cadence, and breath. At a restaurant in Aberdeen, we leave the waitress off balance, as we (unexpectedly) reply in perfect unison "um, yeah, sure" to a question about drink choices. The same kind of thing happens in a meeting with Kristen Kreider as we discuss "Necessary Note" plot choices over steamed lattes in the Southwark Cathedral café not far from London Bridge. We use this as a dramaturgical device in our live performance work. We

61 Walter Benjamin, "The Nordic Sea," in *The Storyteller: Tales Out of Loneliness*, ed. Sam Dolbear, Esther Leslie, and Sebastien Truszkowski, trans. Sam Dolbear, illus. Paul Klee (Verso, 2016), 120.

62 Samuel Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities* (Harvard University Press, 2008), 320.

63 Ibid.

rehearse the synchronous use of “um” and “yeah” and “ah,” finishing each other’s sentences alongside a suite of gestures which include knee slaps, claps, and simultaneous head turns. We recreate the exact cadence and timing of a short recorded message: “Hi, hello, welcome um and thank you uh so much for being here. We’re . . . we’re really pleased you’ve agreed to . . . take part in the investigation.”

White cliffs of Dover.

Shifts in texture, moving in and out of columns of sound.

Low rumbling of ship engines, like a pulse, and then a recorded woman’s voice bouncing around the cliffs in German and English and French, instructions to the cars and trucks rolling off the ferries echoing themselves into a layered counterpoint—and then turning a corner to hear birdsong and the static of wind through leaves. A war-time song by Vera Lynn combining the English pastoral with the English militaristic, replaced in the post-Brexit imagination with endless inspection queues for lorries arriving from France.

The static of wind in my ears.

Principles from the Ongoing Investigation

Operating at the limits of tangible possibility

We cultivate an ongoing organized curiosity which enables us to listen *in* on a variety of contexts. We augment each other's individual enquiries into expanded listening practices, sharing our attraction to modes of attention and orientation. We take almost any opportunity we can to practice this together, and, in practicing, also extend the invitation to what we come to figure as the wider team.

We encounter the wider team in conversation, in workshops, in bars, in cafés, at cultural events, at the beach, in the park, on the way home, in a hotel bar, on a train station concourse, in a taxi, in the lift, in the stairwell, in the archives, at the library, in the foyer, under the bridge, on a skype call, in the underground, at the casino, in a campsite, in a luxury portacabin, by the river, next to a monument, in the harbor, at the marina, on the cliff top, at the out of season resort, on an oil rig, in a stone circle, at a heliport, at the car hire information desk, on a sticky dance-floor, and practically anywhere you can get a sandwich cut into triangles served with a packet of crisps.

We meet live artists, composers, ceramicists, photographers, town councilors, CEOs of multinational corporations, archivists, cultural producers and venue programmers, community arts organizations, self-organizing community-based artists, bikers, sound studies theorists, librarians, security guards, retired coast guards, kombucha brewers, market stall holders, listening therapists, media specialists, travel experts, city workers, dog walkers, children, babies, gamblers, and philosophers.

Amongst ourselves we describe and exchange notes on the chiming of the bell tower, calls overheard on the beach, local funding structures, internal infrastructures of former department stores, a lawsuit, the wane of industries, the occult origins of the European Union, the rise and fall of the film industry, the local transport system, local history, the local press, the national press, the museum, the church, the graveyard, the festival, the lunch options, the dinner menu, the choirs, the students, the rehearsal rooms, the hardware shop, the artist studios, the mountain and outdoor store, the scone provision, the vegan options, the whisky, the architecture, the state of the toilets, the campsite, the dog population, the sound of the sea, the erosion issues, the fishing, the weather, the concerts, the swimming pools, the birds, the tourist season, the arcade, the candy floss, the out of season atmosphere, and the budget hotels.

In our dialogues, conversations, and meetings which unfold slowly over a number of years, a series of principles emerge as a sort of dirty manifesto of Sonic Detection.

1. We reach out with an open and ongoing curiosity, a see-what-we-might-find kinda attitude while holding close the idea that we seldom find nothing;
2. We lightly wear a semi-fiction like an invisible garment that allows us to get caught up in intensive experiences that sit, and can be read, within the everyday;
3. We operate at the border of tangible possibilities by imagining or naming situations or scenarios, pulsating at the edges of our consciousness that we seek to inhabit, allow to materialize, or evaporate;

4. We recognize, through our listening, the multiple possible narratives inscribing themselves onto wherever we go. We recognize the limits of human-centeredness while keeping an ear out for the unheard, the uncanny, the nonhuman, and the dead. We posit the idea of detection as a means to recognize and hold respectful space for that which we might not understand, perceive, or be entitled to engage with.

An interest in the event pulses through the backbone of all four points, the event of encounter, the event of organized collective curiosity, the event of listening, the event of sound. That which is *hereish* and *nowish* comes into earshot and requires us, the team, to orientate (or aurientate?) and bring our attention to bear on forces, energies, ambiances, and abundances that we find ourselves in and within ourselves. That which is occurring “around here” or is “in the ether” and is felt, or intuited, or ripe to be tapped into. These are not hard borders, objects, rules, or defined states, but invisible veils which on the surface might seem to be what keeps the things we think we know in place, yet which, by turning towards them, turn out to be mutable potentials.

No guarantees

If we began with a mutual interest in “eavesdropping” and a meeting point in the capital city of England, it is our reading practice which leads us to Krista Ratcliffe’s analysis of the root of the word, which she describes as “an effective rhetorical tactic: standing outside, in an uncomfortable spot, on the border of knowing and not knowing, granting others the inside position, listening to learn.”⁶⁴ As we occupy a series of uncomfortable spots and inhabit forms of knowing and not knowing, we find ourselves articulating what we do and how we do it through a series of methods that assist in verifying our credentials as sonic detectives. Simultaneously these also serve as the means by

64 Ratcliffe, “Eavesdropping as a Rhetorical Tactic,” 90.

which we share what we do with the wider team in educational and artistic settings that include classrooms, cultural centers, and on stages at live gigs.

1. Tuning

An ongoing effort of attention to often nuanced interactions occurring between site, human, and nonhuman entities. This is not always focused or locatable; it can feel akin to working the evidence of a crime scene. Liable to drift while also able to settle, the effort may lead to the assembly of an idea or a thought, though this is not always the case.

Afterall, there are no guarantees.

2. The extract and the abstract

Taking what gets detected in the “tuning” phase, the extract and the abstract engage technique to turn ideas, or thoughts, into creative-critical writing, scores, electronic music, collage, diagrams, lists, or makeshift sculptures.

Extraction can sometimes operate as a vexed metaphor for site-specific practice in which an artist extracts material for their own use. Resonance is also insinuated with extractive industries which fit with research we conducted into the coal and oil industries in relation to the specific sites of Seaham in County Durham and Aberdeen.

The extract also holds interest in its creative potential, its partiality, and its connection to a context even when it circulates beyond that to which it is seemingly tied.

3. The red herring

To return to a point we make in the prelude to “Necessary Note”: In the detective novel there are distractions, diversions, and dead ends. Most detective novels move through a location motivated by dogged investigation, chance encounters, impossible coincidences, and seemingly incidental details. There is a promise that the ongoing effort of attention to the incidental, the contingent, the local, the event, will, in the end, have been necessary.

While these might be frameworks to communicate our research processes and allow routes in and out of what we are doing, it is precisely *in the doing* of artistic research and *in the doing* of listening that we get to be able to articulate this. The project, and us along with it, are pulled into a series of different realities which pulsate alongside various interlocutors we encounter. None of these meetings or conversations will be thought of as separate or casual, but as part of the ongoing investigation, as somehow informing what we are shaping as it takes shape. This is the performative apparatus we bring into being. And it is through the doing of the work that we summon a critical sensibility which acts as a lever to give us insight into the competing realities at stake in each site. Artistic research as “sonic detection” gives insight into what we are *in* and reveals the dominant ideologies and imposed political, social, and economic apparatuses in operation.

A Note

(December 12, 2025)

I have something to say and I'm not sure how to say it.

This note is the only part of *Sonic Detection* that I have written without Rebecca's contribution. Of course, in an important sense, that's not true. This note is in conversation with Rebecca, as is everything that I write. It is inflected by Rebecca's style and taste, by the things we agreed on and the things we disagreed about, and by the unconscious rhythms and inclinations I developed by thinking in action with Rebecca. However, in another, also important, sense, I will never write with Rebecca again.

Tragically, Rebecca passed away about eighteen months from the time I am writing this. I struggled with whether to include an explicit mention of this within the body of this text. The book was, for all intents and purposes, finished when Rebecca died. We submitted a revised manuscript in March 2024 and she had a chance to look at and weigh in on possible cover designs. While I have finalized a few things, including copyediting, this was the sort of labor we shared and weren't precious about. So it bothers me: What right to do I have to foreground my own voice now, when she can't contribute? In every part of *Sonic Detection*, the first-person pronoun (singular and plural) has been a playful tool for stretching, poking holes in, critically appraising, evading and exaggerating our sense of ourselves as individuals with agency and vulnerable parts of collectives that both sus-

tain and have the capacity for damage. Now, “I” and “we” feel stiff and weighted in ways I’m not sure are right. Would it have been better, fairer, to say that the book as we wrote it is the book that should be published? I’m still not certain. However, I have chosen to place this note here, rather than as an addendum or appendix at the beginning or end of the book because that would have felt even more intrusive to the overall structure we agreed on. This is the section we designated for reflection on process, so I am taking my cue from that.

In June 2024, we were due to meet in London, to give a talk about “Sonic Assemblies” at the Performance Studies international conference. Rebecca was supposed to fly from Madrid, where she had recently moved to start a five-year Ramón and Cajal research fellowship with the Visual Culture and Art History Research Group at the Spanish National Research Council. This was a fulfilment of a dream for Rebecca. She considered Madrid — where her partner lived and where she had spent many happy years across her life — her home.

Rebecca didn’t make it to London. I got a message from her partner saying she was in the hospital, that she was very ill. Over three anxious and then frantic days, it became clear that she would not survive the tumor that had appeared in her brain, seemingly out of nowhere. I was grateful to be in a city where we had close friends in common and grateful to be able to fly to Madrid to stand with friends and her family the day after her death to say goodbye. In a small, private ceremony, I tried to explain how in the time I spent with Rebecca, it felt like we were simultaneously constructing and occupying an alternative universe that resembled our own in every particular except it was a few crucial degrees more intense. It was not a surprise to find that others felt the same way, that this was her extraordinary, singular mode.

In Lyn Hejinian’s preface to *Hearing*, a book collaboratively written with the poet Leslie Scalapino, Hejinian mourns the fact that her co-author, who died of pancreatic cancer, was not able to contribute to the framing of the published text. She describes some of the processes and events that convinced her to publish

the book in Scalapino's absence but admits that the "question as to whether *Hearing* was finished or not will always be an open one."⁶⁵ She goes on to state that in writing the book together, a book which takes practices and experiences of hearing as a starting point for a joint philosophical adventure at the edges of perception and meaning, the two "experienced being wide awake in a world to which one can never be entirely or permanently reconciled."⁶⁶

One of the strange and disorienting things about the days just after Rebecca died was how her death continued for some time to feel like the least salient part of her character, almost a minor attribute, far less compelling than everything else about her. So, one of the difficult things about grieving her has been noticing how death seeps backward, taking more and more space in the quotient of meaning by which I understand her life and our relationship. As we write elsewhere in the book, this relationship could feel delicate, built on contingencies and intuitions rather than existing templates (romantic, professional, familial). At the same time, it also felt stubborn. Alongside the sense that the work we did together could have ended at any time was the sense, which I believe to have been reciprocal, that we might be involved in the ongoing investigation for the rest of our lives, and beyond. So ultimately, the reason it feels important to include this note is that we are both, I believe, facing the possibility that this was, is, and will be true.

65 Lyn Hejinian, "Preface," in Lyn Hejinian and Leslie Scalapino, *Hearing* (Litmus Press, 2021), n.p.

66 Ibid.

SCORES

Introduction

What follows are two scores for performance works developed and shown in Seaham and Aberdeen. We include these artifacts from performance to bring questions of documentation and evidencing to the foreground of our thinking about sonic detection. We have collaborated with design collective Bricks from the Kiln (BFTK) to re-present these scores as artworks in their own right. BFTK is an irregular journal and multifarious publisher, with a research interest in graphic design and typography as form. We worked with Matthew Stuart and Andrew Walsh-Lister, founders of BFTK, remotely, through Zoom conversations. Andrew was in the process of moving from the US to the UK at the time, and he told us about the shipping container that was, as we spoke, crossing the Atlantic with his belongings.

The two scores take typographical and design cues from the feminist tradition of text-based performance scores, influenced in particular by the deceptively plain look of *Women's Work*, a magazine originally published by Alison Knowles and Annea Lockwood in two issues, in 1975 and 1978, and compiled in a new edition in 2019 by Primary Information, with scores by such

artists as Pauline Oliveros, Shiomi Mieko, and Simone Forti.¹ Curator Irene Revell, reflecting on her work as managing editor of the new edition and on her curatorial work on an exhibition arising from her encounter with the original editions, highlights how these scores exemplify “speculative feminist potential” in making explicitly evident “the negotiation between autonomy and collaboration inherent in such performance scores more widely.”² Our two scores take up the instructional mode of these earlier works, simultaneously documenting an actual event of performance and opening up to the possibility of future events performed by others. As works fundamentally embedded within a collaborative and participatory process, the negotiation Revell identifies—and its feminist and queer potential politics—are core to our aims. Irregularities of grammar and punctuation remain in the texts to give a sense of these scores as working documents used in the creation of performance.

The Seaham score arises from a collaboration with composer and experimental turntablist Mariam Rezaei, who assembled the score, and it reflects Rezaei’s knowledge and understanding of avant-garde traditions of improvisation, group processes, and alternative notation systems. The score includes a mix of sonic games whose rules are developed in associative ways from our experiences listening in on Seaham, and scripted material drawn from a range of sources, including the *Eavesdropbox* interactive installation designed by Lalya Gaye and Stu Her-ring for the Seaham Public Library. We have also reprinted Jean Lowes’s poem “Rocky Shore” with her permission. We detail the process of working with Mariam in the previous section of this book. Mariam’s singular style as a sonic artist is an ongoing inspiration.

The Aberdeen score takes a different hybrid approach, mixing the direct address of instruction with essayistic texts and

1 Alison Knowles and Annea Lockwood, eds., *Women’s Work* (Primary Information, 2019).

2 Irene Revell, “Speculating on the ‘Feminist Performance Score’: Pauline Oliveros, Womens Work and Karen Barad,” *Contemporary Music Review* 41, nos. 2–3 (2022): 284.

poetic experimentation. Our motivations in creating the text and the performance work included experimentation with voice as persona, and speech as material. The grainy, stripped-back, and lyrically extraordinary songs of Aberdeen-based psych-folk musician the Kitchen Cynics were in our ears as we made this performance work, and Pete Stollery's sophisticated compositional rigor was a scaffold for it. We continued to work on writing from "Stolen Voices: Aberdeen" in sections of "Necessary Note," so there are echoes and distorted repetitions across the two pieces. Both of the scores engage specificity of place and encounter alongside the possibilities of a continually unfolding process and an openness to new encounters.

SEAHAM SCORE

i *SEAHAM*

Vocal Ensemble. 4 minutes. Acoustic or amplified.

Call and Response.

Vocal leader to create a live 'looped' vocal soundscape of Seaham using vocal blends, on any pitch, of:

f-v-f
s-z-s
m-ng-m
oo-ee-oo

Tempo is controlled by gentle breathing speeds.

Dynamics are soft and articulations are to fade in and out.

Silence on inhalation, sound on exhalation.

Once a soundscape is created, soloist details can be added to the soundscape, for example, seagulls, whistling, crying, humming, etc.

ii *SEEHAM*

Electronic soundscape of Seaham composed from listening in on-the-ground and research with local artists. Rebecca's recording research with participants.

iii *BOUNCERS*

Vocal Duet with walkie talkies.

YES // NO // MAYBE // COME ON //

Using only the words 'yes,' 'no,' 'maybe,' 'come on,' have an improvised spoken and sung conversation in close proximity to each other over poor quality walkie talkies.

Two vocalists stand facing the audiences and adjacent to each other, but without looking at each other at any point.

Duration of 3 minutes.

Tempo, dynamics and articulation are open.

iv *Shanty For A Man Without Friends*

Electronic composition, a wordless sea shanty based on vowel sounds with church bells.

v *Rocky Shore*

(reading over *Shanty For A Man Without Friends*)

By Jean Lowes

In his head,
incessant pounding, crashing waves,
early morning mist,
delicate solitude.

In his eyes,
Landscape lines
Sky, horizon, flowing water,
broken beach, polluted,
Protect limestone marked cliffs.

In his mouth,
Dry and sour,
Taste of rust and sulphur.
His body cold, stiff and creaking.

Hair stiff with salt.
 His stomach growls,
 People approach,
 Dons his cowboy hat and
 Climbs the cliff
 To spend time with others,
 Find sustenance
 For the night ahead.
 Ahead with his storms.

vi *Gossip Birds*

For three performers.

The text is in two parts and to be split
 between three performers for performance.

-
- Text a) NEW PERSON / NEW ANSWERS:
- 1) INSERT ANSWER TEXT ABOUT
 SURROUNDINGS:
 - 2) INSERT ANSWER TEXT HEARD
 OVER THE WEEK:
 - 3) INSERT ANSWER ABOUT THE
 SOUNDS TYPICAL OF THIS
 PLACE:
-

Use auxiliary instruments to substitute
 punctuation markings.

Performers to work together to assign
 specific parts to specific instruments and
 voices.

Substitute sounds for vocal sound effects
 and use auxiliary instruments when possi-
 ble.

Text b) Children, Seagull, Sheep, Ship,
Sea, Waves

Using counts of 2, 3, 4, and 5, substitute words in this repeating text for bird whistles throughout the text.

Do this for each performer so that the bird whistles differ on every line.

This method will begin to make a train engine sound effect in performance.

vii *C'Mon, C'Mon, C'Mon*

For multiple voices

*Lyrics by Mariam Rezaei, Johanna Linsley,
and Rebecca Collins*

Seaham, so kind, a bonny old town
This, I ask of you
I'm listening close, my ear to the ground,
C'mon, c'mon, c'mon

Tuck me in tight, I hear church bells at
night,
Legends of brave men at sea
Tell me your stories of strife and glory
Tell me of what should I dream?

I'll tell you a tale of a woman of grey
Often sad, sometimes scary, all true.
I'll sing you a song of a man long gone,
C'mon, c'mon, c'mon

I'll write you a poem, I'll sing you a
song,
We'll eat our chips from a cone
The sun, the sand, and a drink in my hand,
C'mon, c'mon, c'mon

I'll buy you an icecream all wrapped up in
 wool,
 With olives and liquorice to boot
 You'll eat it all up until you are full
 C'mon, c'mon, c'mon

Seaham of old,
 Seaham of new,
 When did the collieries close?

Seaham of old,
 Seaham of new,
 What will the tide bring in?
 I'll fashion a town on a wrought iron slab
 And put you inside it for good
 That town won't appear on any old map
 C'mon, c'mon, c'mon

I'll find you a ring made of sea glass and
 gold
 With olives and liquorice to boot
 You'll eat it all up until you are full
 C'mon, c'mon, c'mon

Seaham of old,
 Seaham of new,
 When did the collieries close?

Seaham of old,
 Seaham of new,
 What will the tide bring in?
 I'll fashion a town on a wrought iron slab
 And put you inside it for good
 That town won't appear on any old map
 C'mon, c'mon, c'mon

I'll find you a ring made of sea glass and
 gold

We'll walk on the blast at dawn
Get scratched by a fish bone and never
return
C'mon, c'mon, c'mon

I'll find you a ring made of sea glass and
gold
We'll walk on the blast at dawn
Get scratched by a fish bone and never
return
C'mon, c'mon, c'mon

Seaham of old,
Seaham of new,
We'll open our throats and we'll sing

Seaham of old,
Seaham of new,
What will the tide bring in?

Upon this dreary shore we have
Nothing but meetings and shipwrecks
Elmy's fate was an unwelcomed storm
C'mon, c'mon, c'mon

Seaham of old,
Seaham of new,
We'll open our throats and we'll sing

Seaham of old,
Seaham of new,
What will the tide bring in?

Seaham I write this ode to you,
A town of coal, glass and sand.
Of times hard spent, of times long gone,
C'mon, c'mon, c'mon

ABERDEEN SCORE

(1) BRIEFING

Visit a coastal town as many times as the budget allows over a six month period.

- I. Note modes of transportation available.
- II. Tell people in the town about the visit. Note their response.
- III. Tell friends and acquaintances about the visits and determine whether they have connections to the town. Note their affiliations.
- IV. Read novellas and watch TV series set in the town. Note plot lines, make lists of any named restaurants, bars, cafes, or local landmarks. Attempt to visit them all on your visits. Keep note.
- V. Use notes in i-iv to write a performance text.
- VI. Book a public venue to perform the performance text.
- VII. Rehearse. Consider adding choreography e.g. shared looks, claps, leg slaps etc.
- VIII. Invite the people from the town, friends, acquaintances, community groups, patrons, local CEOs, art-

ists, authors, writers, directors,
and anyone else available to listen.

EXAMPLE:

We arrive by different means: plane,
train — '— boat,' one of us adds.

But that can't be true.

Share a look between us

When we told people we were coming to
Aberdeen, unexpected numbers wanted us to
know about their own connections to the
city.

One source, S, told us his father was a
pilot and flew for a few years between
Aberdeen and Lerwick, in the Shetland
Islands, where the father also lived.

When S was fourteen or fifteen, he would
make his own way on holidays from the
south coast of England, where he was at
boarding school, to Aberdeen, where he
would have to find his brother, also travel-
ling alone.

This kind of thing was more common in the
1970s.

Once or twice, his father took S and his
brother on a helicopter out to one of

the big oil rigs then newly installed in the North Sea. The novelty of this soon wore off, and the discomfort of helicopter travel discouraged further visits.

We were on the 30th floor of a glass-clad high-rise in the City of London when S told this story, and several times he backed away from the window, claiming vertigo.

Simultaneous clap, or similar

A friend, E, told us that her father, whose parents were from Aberdeen, has a local paper sent to his house, though he's lived in Stoke-on-Trent all his life.

Clap and share a look

An acquaintance is making a performance project drawing on the novels of Nan Shepherd, and her depictions of rural Aberdeenshire, and another acquaintance has nearly finished a monograph on the author.

Each of us simultaneously slaps the top of our thighs

Shepherd seems to be having a revival, in fact, a sense which is reinforced when one of us finds a paperback copy of *Quarry Wood* in the WH Smith at the train station in Bristol.

Further movement/gesture, dip knees?

More tangential tidbits, too: a friend's ex-boyfriend is a Greenpeace activist who spends three months on, three months off a ship called the Rainbow Warrior, the third of the organisation's ships to hold that name.

The first — which was bombed by French secret service agents in 1985, killing one activist — we discover was built in Aberdeen in 1955, originally for the UK Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

It's like this with anything — *Pause*

Share a look between us

We turn our attention to something and suddenly it's everywhere.

Everywhere.

Aberdeen is very like this.

And like with anything, we will have to follow up all of these leads, wherever that may take us.

(2) OLIVES AND LIQUORICE / ICE CREAM AND WOOL

Listen for incongruities, for terms which cannot accommodate each other.

- I. Keep note of odd combinations and phrases that jar.
- II. Use these to construct a rhythmic performance text for two voices.
- III. Experiment with variation so the text stretches and transforms.

EXAMPLE:

Olives and liquorice

Ice cream and wool

Olives and liquorice

Olives and liquorice

Ice cream and wool

Ice cream and wool

Olives and liquorice

Olives and liquorice

Ice cream and wool

Ice cream and wool

Olives in liquid

Ovals of liquorice

Ice cream and wool

Ice cream and wool

Olives and liquorice

Olives and liquorice

Ice cream and oil

I dream of school

Repeat, etc.

(3) INK WELLS, OIL WELLS, AND RIGS

Lend an ear to connections where there can't be connections or where the crucial piece of context is missing.

- I. Walk around the town. Look for lists. Try going to local public attractions, e.g., museums, former anatomy rooms, old colleges, and repurposed buildings. Make lists of lists.
- II. Locate texts related to the main industry of the town. Read works by political and social theorists. Note down key quotations.
- III. Locate literary works associated with the town. If relevant, or of use, make a list of chapter titles and use short citations that relate to the local landscape, sensorial orientations and anything else you feel is noteworthy.
- IV. Think about the main industry or former industry of the town.
 - a) Make a list of products associated with this industry.
 - b) Make a list of the agents and agencies associated with this industry.
- V. Use the material gathered in I - IV to write a text for performance.

Experiment with rhythm, tone, and
the separation of syllables in the
delivery.

EXAMPLE:

Two beats with the feet

Crime and Punishment

Beat

Local History

Beat

Jacobites

Beat

Archaeology

Beat

Witchcraft

Two Beats

The joy of fragments and leaps of associa-
tion.

Automobiles

Audi

And paint

Primer

And polish

Mr Sheen

And nylon

Ropes

And detergents

Daz

And perspex

Windows
And polythene
Bags
And dry cleaning fluid
Dry Cleaning fluid
And waterproof coats
The North Face
And ink

In 1935, in a school in Aboyne, the winter was so cold the students' ink froze in their ink wells. In other years, in other schools, too, ink froze

JH tries to beat RC to the end of the line

Two Stomps

Government
US Government
Host Governments
European Union
UK Government

Two Beat

External Affairs
Lobby Groups
Cultural Institutions
NGOs
PR Firms
Media

Two Beat

Finance
International Financial Institutions
Analysts
Banks

Institutional Investors

Two Beat

Industry

Universities and research initiatives

Business allies

Exploration Companies

Oil Services

Environmental consultants

Two Beat

"Carbon itself must be transformed, beginning with the work done by those who bring it out of the ground. The transformations involve establishing connections and building alliances – connections and alliances that do not respect any divide between material and ideal, economic and political, natural and social, human and nonhuman, or violence and representation. The connections make it possible to translate one form of power into another. Understanding the interconnections between using fossil fuels and making democratic claims requires tracing how these connections are built, the vulnerabilities and opportunities they create and the narrow points of passage where control is particularly effective."¹

Separate syllables

Skeleton cases

¹ Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (Verso, 2011), 7.

Mortuary shoe lane

Mortuary

Museum rail cases

Shell rooms

Lecture theatre

X-ray room

Assistants' room

Store cellar

Overlap from the end of the final sentence

The problem with knowledge is not that we
can't know things.

The problem with knowledge is that things
change.

The problem with knowledge is that knowing
things changes things.

The problem with knowledge is that many
things are kept secret.

The problem with knowledge is that it's
difficult to find things out and remember
them.

*Sung on one tone, use tuning forks to
establish*

The Plateau

The Recesses

The Group

Water

Frost and Snow

Air and Light

Spoken

Life: The Plants

Life: Birds, Animals, Insects

Life: Man

Sung

Sleep

The Senses

Being

But the full certainty of understanding
Was his not over. He had oft to go
Among the worlds, and knew their fierce
demanding,
Sharing their troubled littleness, their
woe
Not little. For only thus could he endure
Divinity upon him, and unfold
Its thousandfold intensity. The lure

Of the worlds had called him and their
tale untold.

So grew he, oft surrendering complete
And rounded silences and brimmed desire
And chose bewildering war: but deemed it
meet.

For though he had learnt the All, and
might not tire
Of knowing it, he knew not yet the whole
Of those inconstancies and alterations
That dwell resolved in God. God of his
soul
He knew the fulfilment, but —²

A list on a sign outside of the Tollbooth
Museum

A list of commodities which would not
exist without oil, as described by the
Peter Riegert and Peter Capaldi characters
in the 1983 film *Local Hero*

The nodes in a network of power relation-
ships that environmental activist group
Platform calls 'the carbon web'

A directory found in the Anatomy Rooms at
Marshall College

A list of chapter titles from Nan Shep-
herd's *The Living Mountain*

A list of lists

2 Nan Shepherd, *The Quarry Wood* (Canongate, 2010), 87.

(3) NOTHING, RED HERRINGS AND FALSE STARTS

Develop a familiarity with your own anxious uncertainties and ambiguous motivations.

- I. Set yourself tasks and goals based on spontaneous intuition. Keep notes on the outcomes of these tasks.
- II. As you spend time in the town accomplishing your tasks, certain local institutions may take on particular significance. Document this process.
- III. Similarly, certain names, objects, books, pieces of media, historical events, may seem auspicious. Pay attention to coincidences and synchronicities.
- IV. Strike up conversations with strangers in transient places like hotel bars, train stations, and theatre foyers. Adopt the attitude that these conversations might reveal hidden meanings or obscured connections.
- V. Assemble these hints, clues and symbols. Induce a crisis of meaning.
- VI. Create a performance text that narrates the construction and dissolution of meaning.

EXAMPLE:

In the morning, we set out, and because setting out requires a destination, we head to the Beach Ballroom, where there is a pamphlet we'd like to pick up. In the entrance hall, there are black and white photographs showing politicians and pop stars using the ballroom, including The Beatles in 1963. We walk around inspecting the tiaras and sequined handbags on sale in glass cabinets near the restrooms. The main function room is decked out – for a Muslim wedding, we are later informed by a man in a grey suit who fiddles with his bow tie. He performs the kindest eviction routine we have ever experienced, asking us politely to leave whilst handing us the pamphlet we were looking for.

Post-eviction, we turn to face the sea. Or, in more accurate terms, a strong wind slaps us in the face and we turn to register our protest. One of us waxes lyrical about how hard-working the North Sea is: helicopters circle overhead, big ships move to and from offshore rigs, and giant waves crash onto the beach. The theme tune to the 1994 BBC TV series *Roughnecks* rings in our ears as we imagine high-vis boiler suits, safety helmets and thick boots.

Hum the theme tune to Roughnecks

The image gradually turns into a scene from Ian Rankin's Inspector Rebus novel *Black and Blue* where Rebus finds Greenpeace

protesters handcuffed to these very rail-
ings. We drift to an offshore zone, though
its accuracy is suspect, informed by these
cultural objects and, even more, a display
at the Maritime museum we took in earlier.
Nevertheless, tiny spaces begin to take on
large significance. The most meticulous of
us makes a list:

ONE

Clap

The space between a deep-sea diving suit
and your skin;

TWO

Clap

The space between the first and third floor
of the hoosie you were born in;

THREE

Clap

The space between shifts and the reporting
of a malfunction and the biggest offshore
oil disaster ever.

Pause

It was a cold gust that took us out of
ourselves, and an even colder one brings
us back to the present moment

Face each other

It is all getting too much.

In the afternoon, we set out, looking for a cosy hideout. We head to The Grill. Our meticulous one becomes entranced by the architectural details and makes some notes:

An intricately plastered oval-shaped mould looms above us on the ceiling, complete with a carefully carved decorative perimeter which features patterns of leaves, or similar. Whisky bottles are staged inside small glass cabinets. The bottles vibrate and shift with the movement of the elderly woman behind the bar and the sounds of conversation on the other side, rhythmically tapping against the glass. Dry, wheat-coloured grass softens and slightly muffles the clinking sound, cushioning and caressing the movement of the containers. Conversation is the main deal here; frosted glass on the windows keeps the outdoors at bay. The warmth of mahogany veneer all around, on the bar and the walls and all around, preserves the room's historical legacy yet hints at something resonating beyond what is immediately present.

This bar is where the opening scene of Stewart Home's experimental, pornographic novel *69 Things to Do with a Dead Princess* takes place. Anna Noon, the protagonist, enters the bar, noting the refusal of the

establishment to install a women's toilet, indicative of a reluctance to admit women patrons full stop. When we visit, the toilet situation has improved, and the women behind the bar are more than outmatched by the women drinking and chatting. There are, still, many more men than women, a situation that we've noted in other venues in the city. We take out our list of venues and bars mentioned in the novel and decide we may as well visit them. This is a tactic suggested by the book itself, which is structured by a series of trips the main characters take to stone circles in the surrounding countryside in an effort to recreate the journey of another (fictional) book, in which the narrator claims to have toured these Aberdeenshire stone circles with the corpse of Princess Diana as part of a plot to cover up her murder. In *69 Things* Anna and her lover/nemesis/alter-ego Alan lug around a ventriloquist dummy called Dudley, weighing him down with bricks to approximate the weight of Diana, in an effort to test the feasibility, if not veracity, of the conspiracy.

In the following section, some texts are sung, using tuning forks to produce a harmonic chord

We get all the way to the Caledonian Hotel (now part of the national Mercure hotel group chain), before we realise that our own efforts are tinged with the futility of the arbitrary, and that in fact, it is the problem of the arbitrary that we are

trying to solve. As eavesdroppers, we are necessarily in the business of the contingent, of the responsive, of the indeterminate. And yet, we have the sense that all of this listening, if it is of any use at all, has to give us some sense – however obscured or noisy – of the connections between things, and how these connections might be taken together to form shapes and systems.

The bar at the Caledonian is empty, so its eavesdropping potential is strictly limited. The bartender quite naturally asks us if we want a drink, and we all simultaneously draw a blank. One of us says that we are here to meet a friend, but that we're a bit early, so we won't have a drink just yet. Then we go back on this story, and tell her that we're in the wrong place, and we have to leave, but that maybe we'll be back. We're sure that she knows we're lying, and yet we're confident that she will not guess the truth – that we're seeking material for a sonic fiction, and the bar has not lived up to our requirements.

Experiment with the following parts, each saying a sentence simultaneously/overlapping/etc.

In the morning, we set out, and because setting out requires a destination, we head to the Beach Ballroom.

In the morning, we set out, and because
setting out requires an intention, we head
to the Beach Ballroom.

In the morning, we set out, and because
setting out requires a destination, we
head to the Beach Ballroom

In the morning, we set out, and because
setting out requires an intention, we head
to the Beach Ballroom

In the morning we set out, and because
setting out requires sustenance, we head
to the Sand Dollar café.

In the morning we set out, and because
setting out requires a cause, we handcuff
ourselves to some rails by the harbour,
until we realise that Greenpeace aren't
coming.

In the morning we set out, and because
setting out requires training, we register
for an MA in decommissioning oil rigs at
the University of Aberdeen.

Say the next four lines simultaneously

We set out and we look for people to talk
to.

We set out and we look for people to con-
sult.

We set out and we look for people to talk
to.

We set out and we look for people to consult.

We look for people to consult, and the first person we find asks us, what if you find nothing?

What if we find nothing?

In the morning, we set out, and because setting out requires a destination, we head to the Belmont cinema, where we've heard a seagull has recently been denied entry for non-payment

In the morning we try to set out, but we get sucked into a YouTube hole after someone sends us a link to something called *Telly Savalas Looks at Aberdeen*, a short kitschy film from 1981. The 1927 Cinematograph Films Act required a certain percentage of films shown in British cinemas to be made by British film companies. One director, Harold Baim, made a career of producing 'quota quickies', or short, cheaply produced films that could be shown before a feature film screening so that cinemas could comply with the law. Baim made this particular quota quickie with the American TV star, Telly Savalas (star of the 70s cop show *Kojak*) along with two other similar films, in which Telly Savalas looks at Portsmouth and Birmingham. Telly Savalas never actually went to any of those cities, and recorded his voiceover from the comfort of Southern California.

In the morning, we head to the Belmont cinema and a crowd of teenage girls surrounds us like a swarm of red herrings.

What if we find nothing but a swarm of sustainable red herrings?

One of us believes that the key figure in all of this is Alan

One of us believes that white chocolate and raspberry scones are significant

One of us believes that the key figure in all of this is Alan because a text about the flat we were staying in instructed us to look for the buzzer labelled "Alan."

One of us believes that white chocolate and raspberry scones are significant because we saw them on the same day in both Food Story and in Thain's 24-hour Bakery on George Street, and none of us had ever heard of this flavour combination, certainly in scone form, before in our lives.

All of us believe that Alan is significant as it's also the name of the central character in Stewart Home's *69 Things to Do with a Dead Princess*.

This is not to mention the fact that we all know someone named Alan in Seaham, a town in East Durham where we have some history.

One of us buys two scones from both places

One of us makes a list of all of the bars,
pubs, and restaurants mentioned in the
novel

All of us conduct a taste and appearance
test of the white chocolate and raspberry
scones from Thain's and from Food Story

All of us attempt to visit all of the
places on the list which are still open

All of us agree that the white chocolate
and raspberry scones look and taste dif-
ferent to each other both in texture and
crumb

All of us agree that this is not the best
use of our time

Not the best use of resources
Not the best use of local knowledge
Not the best use of infrastructure
Not the best use of the environment

All of us agree that it is just a coinci-
dence that white chocolate and raspberry
scones are sold a few streets away from
each other in the same town,

it happens

It happens

It happens

it just so happens that... Food Story is
closed on a Sunday

It just so happens that... there is a
half-eaten plate of sandwiches on the bar
in Wagleys

It just so happens that... this is the
farthest North I have ever been

It just so happens that... a toddler in
Bistro Verde throws their coat on the
floor, spins it around and flips it upside
down as a way to put it on the right way
up

It just so happens that... a boulder in
the North Sea obstructs the insertion of a
wind turbine

It just so happens that... in 1598 Andrew
Man was convicted of witchcraft including
such offences as healing sickness, consort-
ing with the devil who took the form of
the queen of Elfin and having children with
her and learning that the devil is raised
by speaking the word...

*Both as if we are going to speak the word
... wait to see if the devil is going to
come, a crisis moment in the room.*

A crisis requires defining an object or
assemblage under threat

A crisis introduces a single threat

A crisis simplifies changes in multiple
fields

A crisis simplifies a complex sequence of
events into a unique moment

A crisis looks for a guilty party

A crisis points the finger

A crisis needs interpretation

A crisis leaves clues

A crisis is a fictional construct

"The feelings of intense insecurity and
impending doom that crisis implies do not
necessarily occur at a single point in
time nor only in the context of a visible
'disaster'." ³

"The description of a sequence of events
as a 'crisis' simplifies changes in multi-
ple fields, involving various agents, into
a unique event, so that a single moment,
with a single agent, appears responsible
for a collapse of the old order." ⁴

Lone men trickle into the town by train,
boat, plane

3 Jane Nadel-Klein, "Granny Baited the Lines: Perpetual Crisis and the
Changing Role of Women in Scottish Fishing Communities," *Women's
Studies International Forum* 23, no. 3 (2000): 364.

4 Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy*, 173.

2,565 babies are born, many of them named
Jack or Oliver or Olivia

A family assembles in a seafood restaurant
to mark a fiftieth birthday

A young couple heads to the Transition
Extreme Skatepark

A blogger on a WordPress blog called Afro-
Aberdeen discusses the meaning of the
Doric phrase 'Fit like'

Pairs of single people meet in person for
the first time in the Carmelite Hotel

A group of pensioners learn basic com-
puting skills at the Silver City Surfers
Internet Cafe in Seaton

30,000 Scots move to Poland after trade
agreements are established in the late
1400s between Aberdeen and the old Baltic
seaport of Danzig

A flock of arctic seagulls dive-bomb a stag
party on Belmont street

A property broker on the Aberdeen Voice
Facebook Group advertises luxury student
accommodation close to the University and
the city centre

- (4) YOU WON'T SEE IT, BUT YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO
HEAR IT

An audio scavenger hunt sources sounds,
sound technologies, acoustic properties
within the local landscape, and sonic-
inflected histories.

I. Seek contact with local communities.

- a) Conduct a workshop, or series of
workshops with all, or either, of
the following:

o Groups of local artists

o Teenagers attached to local
youth media programmes

o Community groups

Duration: Minimum 3 hours. Maximum
3 days.

- b) During the workshop send partici-
pants to listen for 8 of the fol-
lowing:

o A sound that is typical of this
place

o A sound where you don't know
what's making it

o A sound that is a warning

o A sound that is inviting

- o A conversation
 - o A sound made by a man
 - o A sound made by a woman
 - o A noise
 - o A sound of the season
 - o A sound that is a rule
 - o Music
 - o A sound related to a body
 - o A sound of technology
 - o A sound you're not supposed to hear
 - o A sound that comes from you
 - o A rhythmic sound
 - o A sound of work
 - o A sound you've never heard before
- c) Have participants write down the sounds heard.
- d) Listen to participants recount their listening experience in words.

o Documentation: Written descriptions. Photographs of the room. Audio recordings of verbal descriptions. Worksheets distributed to participants with a list of sounds on (optional).

e) Write a text for performance combining participant listening experiences with your own collected over the same time period.

f) Whisper the performance text to a live audience with a collaborator, invite participants to listen in.

EXAMPLE:⁵

We stand in a busy location and try to
feel the sounds as they travel through us
We ask passersby to speak through our bodies

We stand in Correction Wynd and listen as
sound travels through space

We listen to one half of a conversation

We sit in the hotel bar at the Caledonian

5 Example derived from workshops in Aberdeen in 2017 conducted at The Anatomy Rooms, Seventeen, and SHMU Station House Media Unity. Thanks to participants Maya Zeco, Jamie Lawson, Bryce Hope, Angela White, Bea Dunsmore, Mark Dunsmore, Stéphanie Vandem, Penny Broe, Nicola Wylie, Rachel Grant, Shelagh Brown, Kim Walker, Gillian Shearer. Thanks also to Murray Dawson, John Anderson & the teenagers at SHMU, to Kirsty Russell and Jim Ewen and Kerry Bain & Elspeth Winram at Aberdeen City Council, and to Lesley Ann Rose.

We struggle to make sonic fiction out of
silence

We use hats to extend acoustic capture
We have heightened hearing capabilities

We take cabs from the airport
We hear local radio stations playing 1970s
American country music

We head to The Grill
We watch whisky bottles vibrate with the
sounds of conversation

We become subsea orientated
We try to do too much and end up doing
nothing at all

II. Seek the company of local busi-
nesses, industries, and/or insti-
tutions using sound technology in
unusual, unexpected, or new ways.

a) Send an email to the CEO request-
ing an interview for the dates you
will be in town.

b) Prepare questions in advance.

c) At the interview use an audio
recording device to document the
conversation.

d) Make a description, in your own
words, of the sound technology and
the possibilities it affords for a
broader audience.

e) Perform the text in a publicly accessible venue, or in public.

f) Invite the CEO and their family to the performance.

EXAMPLE:⁶

About one hundred metres deep, on the bottom of the North Sea, a sub bottom imager hovers above the seabed. This is a device which uses advanced acoustics to provide a real-time view of the sub-seabed in full 3D. Passing up and down like an underwater lawnmower, it interrogates buried infrastructure and geohazards. The machine moves in spaces divers can't, turning sound into pictures, helping you to find something you didn't know you had lost, at a frequency you cannot perceive. The ocean is so vast, so overwhelmingly much more than we are, that we think of it as one unknowable thing. The company which manufactures the sub-bottom imager wants to suggest that you might not see it, but you might be able to hear it.

III. Seek out local landscape features with acoustic properties.

a) Locate the site on a map and source transportation.

⁶ Example derived from interviews and email exchanges with Pangeo Subsea, Aberdeen. Thanks to Bernie Morrison, CEO of PanGeo Subsea in Aberdeen.

- b) Spend time at the site.
- c) Document the visit with audio recordings, photographs, and written text.
- d) Use the documentation and lived experience to describe the visit.

EXAMPLE:

Two women hire a car from Aberdeen airport and drive out to the Easter Aquhorthies stone circle. A recumbent stone is flanked by eleven upright stones, and it is known, by enthusiasts both locally and internationally, that the stones' arrangement around a basin-like depression produces strange acoustic phenomena. The women tread a path around the inside and outside of the stones. They pause. They hold their faces close to the stones. They turn their mouths towards the rock surface and hum, and then open their mouths to sing loudly. The sounds bend and twist and the weirdness they are experiencing convinces one that her stone age ancestors are reaching out. As they leave, the other one notices an unexpected voice message on her phone. They look at each other and wonder, does the neolithic period have mobile service?

IV. Seek sonic-inflected histories

- a) Get in touch with a local archivist, or library.

Ask about the acoustic potential of
their collections.

Await their reply.

Arrange to visit suggested material.

Take notes to document findings.

Use the findings to write a short
scene.

EXAMPLE:

On the top floor of the Town House building on the corner of Broad Street and Union Street, an Aberdeen City archivist handles a bundle of 18th century letters. The paper is beginning to crumble, and as he unfolds the document, grey dust ends up on the tips of his fingers. Letter no.13 is a petition from James Davidson to the Magistrates of Aberdeen dated June 2nd, 1797 it complains about a side wall that has been built between the stocking manufacturers' building and the thread manufacturers' with a gap of less than 18 inches. Debris which drops from the eaves of either building will be trapped in this narrow alley, with no way to reach it.

Who will clean these eaves' droppings?

(5) POSTCARDS FROM THE ONGOING INVESTIGATION

Tune your attention to wider resonances. Connect your investigation of this town with an investigation of other coastal spots. Consider ongoing processes, the unpredictable future meaning of what is made.

- I. Over a period of several years, keep track of bits of trivia and small facts related to the east coast of the UK. The preference is for non-spectacular items that suggest a substrate of mystery without verifying it.
- II. Invent a persona. Without naming her, make a list of her characteristics.
- III. Use i and ii to create a performance text that indicates both an ending and the possibility of continuing.

EXAMPLE:

In summer 2017 the National History Museum in London replaced the giant dinosaur skeleton that stood in the entrance hall for 35 years with the bones of a blue whale

She studied contemporary and academic and classical art

Before 1759, there was no way to calculate
longitude at sea

She brought bad luck to boats

Right now, there are 100,000 lobster pots
between Spurn Point and North Shields

Her positioning has always been precisely
controlled

In 2017 inhabitants of Holderness on the
coastline of York face eviction as the sea
erodes the sea cliff beneath their homes

She was anything but passive

In Seaham, county Durham, plans for a
major film studio seemed like a real pos-
sibility in 2007 and like a strange dream
in 2009

She was retracing steps, moving back and
forth, looking for something misplaced

A social media site which alerts fishermen
to the whereabouts of the Minna, the Jura,
and the Hirta (Scottish Marine Protection
Vehicles) has been taken down

She said the arctic seagulls were the bar-
barians of the city

Britons holidaying on the coast of France
and Spain eat Lobster caught in Bridling-
ton, East Riding on the East Coast of UK

She claimed the sound of the church bell
at night always reminded her of horror
stories

30 Sperm whales were stranded on the
southern coasts of the North Sea; six
washed up on the beach in Lincolnshire

She was both elegant and unyielding

In 1962 a lifeboat, the George Elmy got
caught in a storm off the coast of County
Durham. In 2009 the boat was spotted for
sale on e-bay

She made a score for eight sonic happen-
ings for the city of Aberdeen

Hartlypool surfers swim in water well
below the regulated standards. They prior-
itise the protection of a secluded spot.

She was instrumental in boundary-making

In John Wyndham's *The Kraken Awakes* alien
life thrives in the womb-like conditions
of the deep sea while the British govern-
ment decides what to do. Meanwhile these
aliens melt the polar ice caps and flood
all UK ports and London. Eventually an
ultra-sonic weapon developed by the Japa-
nese destroys the creatures

She bobbed through market downturns and
upturns, through winter hurricanes and
underwater blowouts

We discover the sound of the sea is made
from thousands of tiny bubbles simulta-
neously vibrating and bursting along the
shore

She waxed lyrical about how hard working
the North Sea is

A Dutch video artist makes a fictional film
from handy cam footage which unofficially
records the working life of the single
longest serving employee of a Greek com-
pany which specialises in clean-up efforts
after oil spills

She was attentive to shifts in the order
of things

In 2014, on the Humber River, not far from
Hull, Salt End – the BP chemical plant –
celebrates its centenary

She used her imagination to fill in the
blanks

She turned to face the North Sea

She turned towards Europe

She opened her throat, plugging her ears
for just a moment

And

She sang

CONVERSATION FILES

by Johanna Linsley

Conversation I: Address

To you, to you, to you, toi, toi, toi, from top to bottom of my heat lamp. Here is a swallow terrified but breathing slowly and deliberately in the middle of the measure. Into control shows the hours. I never wanted to tell you I dribbled out for pessimistic radio. Never before and never again. If you give it a heading they'll forgive you. Keep telling yourself it's getting better to simplify the bedspread. With habits like fingers in my hair, but it's personal and the window is open. Keep the pace up. You have to have planned ahead — remember that. We've been talking about it already but I want to ask more explicitly. She says, **underneath the city, there's a network of waterways — rivers that were covered up. That idea of something that's fluid, it's underneath things.**¹ I ask about address. She talks about putting the audience in the position of a dreamer. You're in the position of the one who has the magic imagination. Even when they're not being addressed, they're put at the center of things. It goes in and out of talking about very specific things, issues, and talking to the

1 Here and throughout the “Conversation” sections of this chapter, texts in the darker font are direct quotations from an unpublished interview with Fiona Templeton, held on June 17, 2022 in Glasgow.

reader in order to activate them. You, reader should do this. Or I'm writing to ask you, reader to take this step. I talk about address and logistics. It's how language gets from me to you. But the logistics are always glitchy. It doesn't have to be about breaking things down into units and delivering them. It can be about gathering in or opening out. Recognizing the other person as another, another self like yourself. A bit different. We are these different individuals in the same way. I ask about theater. She says, once you put words into somebody's mouth to actually say to somebody—it completely activates it in a different way. It makes it likely that they would say that.

Introducing, Accounting, Addressing

1. *[Second Person]*

You want to account for a process of artistic research that is also an ongoing conversation. You have been talking for years now and the chat keeps flowing. Conversation is your milieu. A conversation, if it goes on long enough, will be full of irrelevancies, redundancies, dead ends, bad timing, miscommunication and misunderstanding, errors, shorthand and inside jokes, silliness, abandoned propositions, poor reasoning, talking at cross purposes, noise. You want to account for insights you've developed and encountered together and the way this conversation has changed you. You want to account for what it feels like to speak freely and listen carefully. You don't want simply to make a virtue of the contingencies that attend the substance of your conversation. You know that the static, the hiss, the noise are themselves a necessary dimension of the medium, as sound studies scholar Marie Thompson might say.² The medium of conversation, which you might also describe as the medium of address.

As sonic detectives, you address yourselves to specific geographical locations through methods and outcomes that include

2 Marie Thompson, *Beyond Unwanted Sound: Noise, Affect and Aesthetic Moralism* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

writing and performance, meaning performance programed for an audience at a specific time and in a specific place. The writing and the performance interact. You also address yourselves through workshops that you run with groups in different contexts. Participation troubles categorization; it's not "the work" as such but it is central to the work. You are interested to think beyond formal "participation" to the ongoing, varied, and rich series of incidental encounters, events, and engagements the practice of "sonic detection" does not so much produce as makes evident in their particular intensities. This is more akin to the notion of the "ordinary" that Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart allow to structure their formally experimental collaborative writing project *The Hundreds*.³ It is within the flows and structures of the subtly heightened ordinary that the ongoing, more or less continuous conversation unfolds between (not exclusively) the two of you. In some ways everything else is the occasion for this conversation and the conversation is refracted in all of the other things.

2. *[First Person, Plural]*

When we address ourselves to each other, we talk about the collaboration most of all, which we describe variously as "the fiction" and "the investigation." As part of the work of sonic detection, we talk about the dynamics of the fiction, its strengths and weaknesses, its trajectory, its investments, the connection between what we want from it and what we've already done. We turn to each other to learn something about our work together, and if we want to understand what this involves, we need to consider what forms of address we use and how we address ourselves, together, to the places and people we encounter. Michel Foucault's reflections on *parrhesia*, a concept he excavates from his readings of antiquity late in his career, could help us articulate what is at stake in investigating the mechanism of address.

3 Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart, *The Hundreds* (Duke University Press, 2019).

Foucault's investigation is characteristically wide-ranging, touching on — as Jane Rendell notes — “concepts of frankness, truth, danger, criticism, and duty.”⁴ It is a mode of speech that is necessarily addressed to a specific person, that also implicates the speaker. He writes, “the one who speaks of the other implicates himself in what he says, not just in order to affirm that he is exactly true to the truth of what he says but to strive himself to arrive at it.”⁵ Without making grandiose claims to truth on our own behalf, this idea of reciprocal address — being who we are in the act of addressing another — seems valuable.

The difficulty with making this account, though, is perhaps the difficulty the poet Denise Riley describes in her book of essays, *The Words of Selves*, this way:

I labor under what must be a common compulsion: that once I'm forced to speak about myself at all, I must through my own efforts make it sharply true — yet cannot. As if even the most subdued self-reference steered close to a demand for precision it must dangerously fail. In the same breath I fear and feel its fundamental lie.⁶

We don't like to write about ourselves. We find the first person uncomfortable, even as we attempt to evade its responsibilities by pluralizing our pronoun — a central strategy of the fiction we write together. However, the problem of writing about oneself is still there even when there's more than one of you, as is the underlying problem of what it means to tell the truth about oneself when one's “self” isn't entirely under our control. Writer and artist Emma Bennett suggests that in the service-dominated economies of the Global North, “the embodied social acts of

4 Jane Rendell, “Critical Spatial Practice as *Parrhesia*,” *MaHKUscript. Journal of Fine Art Research* 1, no. 2 (2016): 4.

5 Michel Foucault, “Discourse & Truth,” in *Discourse and Truth and Parrhesia*, ed. Henri-Paul Fruchaud and Daniele Lorenzini (University of Chicago Press, 2019), 32.

6 Denise Riley, *The Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony* (Stanford University Press, 2000), 17.

projecting one's 'self' out towards others [...] feel increasingly *like work*.”⁷ She brilliantly argues that odd online phenomena like ASMR (autonomous sensory meridian response) videos are popular because of an anonymous intimacy they produce through direct address, that relieves the viewer of the burden of performing the self as a “coherent image.”⁸ In literary terms, this is related to the problem of the lyric “I,” the subject of poetic expression conceived as self-possessed, transcendent. Sandeep Parmar importantly notes how this assumption is inflected by racial and patriarchal dynamics, writing that, “it is impossible to consider the lyric without fully interrogating its inherent premise of universality, its careful dance between personal expression and impersonality, coded by whiteness.”⁹ At the same time, she is also critical of avant-garde movements in Britain and North America, dominated by white poets, that critique lyric subjectivity as identity politics without sufficiently taking into account how material conditions of poetry production and dissemination, including “commodification of the poet’s identity and perceived life experience,” exclude writers of color from the discursive field. She proposes a notion of “nomadic consciousness” borrowed from the philosopher Rosi Braidotti, to preempt “the violence of fixed binaries in the lyric, self and other.”¹⁰ While acknowledging our own position as white writers and artists, we aim to be attentive to politics of the self—that we are produced in our proximity to others and to our environments in ways that are inextricable from power relationships.

If the first person can be both consolidated and diffused lyrically in a line, we can also unfold ourselves in multiple directions in a sentence. Renee Gladman figures “prose” as an expansive

7 Emma Bennett, “Relief from a Certain Kind of Personhood in ASMR Role-Play Videos,” in *The Restless Compendium: Interdisciplinary Investigations of Rest and Its Opposites*, ed. Felicity Callard, Kimberley Staines, and James Wilkes (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 134. Emphasis in original.

8 Ibid.

9 Sandeep Parmar, “Still Not a British Subject: Race and UK Poetry,” *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry* 12, no. 1 (2020): 14.

10 Ibid., 16.

way with language that creates a field for “the wandering and sometimes stuttering ‘I’ that I associate with discovery.”¹¹ The material for the construction of this field, according to Gladman, is the sentence, and what the sentence affords is “a philosophy of experience, an architecture of reflection and flight.”¹² We want to build on the fraught complexity of the lyric, and the meticulous pathways of the prose sentence as promising orientations for what we want to say about how we talk to each other. For this, we also need a mechanism for thinking not just the written but the spoken, and specifically, the spoken as addressed to another person.

3. [*First Person, Singular*]

I am seeking an example of practice that blows up the possibilities for how sentences, lines, utterances, inflect and inform each other in direct and intimate address. Key change. Jump cut. Narrative shift. It’s 2012, in the black box theater at the Arnolfini gallery in Bristol. I am involved in organizing a conference called *Performing Documents*, where artists and scholars are presenting work that deals with ephemeral artworks, strategies for preserving them, and the wider questions these methods and practices pose. We have invited members of the important 1970s performance and conceptual art group *Theatre of Mistakes* to speak, along with the curator Jason Bowman, who will go on to organize a significant exhibition of their work at Raven’s Row gallery in London. When Fiona Templeton — poet, director, performance artist, and one of the founders of *Theatre of Mistakes* — gives her presentation, I am electrified. It is an examination of the group’s approach to collective authorship, found in works like a collective signature produced by three of the members holding a pen at the same time and writing their own names. Templeton is pointedly critical of the

11 Renee Gladman, “The Person in the World,” in *Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative*, ed. Mary Burger (Coach House Books, 2004), 46.

12 *Ibid.*

erasures this mode of practice can result in, naming it a feminist issue. She gives an example of editing a book publication in which some drawings that she made were initially attributed to Anthony Howell, another founder of the group, who is also taking part in the panel. When she pointed this out, the attribution was changed to “Theatre of Mistakes,” while other drawings remained attributed to Howell. Alongside this explicit critique, though, Templeton has also structured the presentation as a conceptual performance. Her opening words are: “Is it going to be possible, for the duration of this talk, to avoid using the first-person pronoun?”¹³ Then she goes on to do just this. This act of self-effacement, far from obscuring her own position or denying that she is the author of her own words, instead becomes a complex exploration of the importance of accounting for difference within collaborative exchange, and of the complicated dynamics of a particular speaking subject.

This action — saying something by not saying something else, a performative and performed intervention deployed at the level of grammar, a mode of address that is simultaneously direct and oblique — I find exhilarating and it sticks with me. Now, ten years later, I turn to Templeton’s work to find insight into the possibilities of address that are key to the notion of “sonic detection” that we are developing in this book — a notion that I frame here as meaning that is made between people and places,

13 Fiona Templeton, “Authority, Authorship and Authoring in the Theatre of Mistakes,” in *Artists in the Archive: Creative and Curatorial Engagements with the Documents of Art and Performance*, ed. Paul Clarke, Simon Jones, Nick Kaye et al. (Routledge, 2018), 205. In the published version of this text, which I edited, Templeton includes a note about translating the text from a spoken to a printed one. She writes, “This paper has been slightly annotated (in italics) by the original speaker, in response to an editorial request to make more general the material that was specific to the context of the live talk. The original speaker notes the perhaps appropriateness of the further layer of authoring. However, in interrogating the fixing dynamic of documentation of performance, the original talk also asked how to embody the interrogation. How to represent the ephemeral or context-specific, the voice in place, the subject in voices, the supposed illegitimacy of speech, in the later document. Some of that original material is therefore presented as quotation.”

over time and on location. Over many decades, Templeton's work has spanned performance and poetics.¹⁴ These dimensions of her work are intricately imbricated and in this essay I trace her particular mechanisms across discipline. Born in Scotland and working across New York City and London for much of her career, Templeton is, as the writer Claire MacDonald articulates "part of a transatlantic conversation" written "across the historical timespan of English as it moves across continents, dragging its prehistories, and its colonial peregrinations, with it."¹⁵ MacDonald places her alongside a range of writers, poets, artists, and filmmakers — from writers debbie tucker green and Caroline Bergvall to filmmakers Chantal Akerman and Maya Deren to poets Rae Armantrout and Susan Howe — gesturing to the interdisciplinary scope of the work. Sonic detection as a method is conceived with reference to this kind of interdisciplinary and widely circulating context and so my focus on Templeton's work in this essay is also a reaffirmation of this field of engagement.

My approach in what follows is to examine three pieces of Templeton's work: *YOU–The City* (1988); *Recognition* (1996); and *The Medead* (2012), each of which has a complex mode of address at the center of its poetics and performance aesthetic. *YOU–The City* was a landmark work of environmental theater, or what might now be called immersive theater, and has received substantial critical attention for this.¹⁶ Its textual experimentation, built upon a near-excessive deployment of the word "you,"

14 Templeton is Senior Lecturer in Drama at the University of Brunel in London, and Artistic Director and founder of the New York–based company The Relationship. The Relationship produces Templeton's work and also supports new voices through initiatives like the Leslie Scalapino Award for Innovative Women Performance Writers.

15 Claire MacDonald, "Preface," in *The Medead: An Epic of Medea*, by Fiona Templeton (Roof Books, 2014), 11.

16 See, for example, Stanton B. Garner, Jr., "Urban Landscapes, Theatrical Encounters: Staging the City," in *Land/Scape/Theater*, ed. Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri (University of Michigan Press, 2002); Arnold Aronson, *The History and Theory of Environmental Scenography* (Methuen Drama, 2018); or Julia Ritter, *Tandem Dances: Choreographing Immersive Performance* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

has been perhaps less remarked upon. This work frames address logistically, a question of movement, timing, relationship, and exchange. *Recognition* was a work created in collaboration with performer Michael Ratomski, who died of AIDS during the creation of the piece. He nevertheless “performs” via videotape, with which Templeton interacts. The play is a bold and moving experiment at the limits of address that understands meaning-making as radically collaborative, which I argue informs the work’s subtle politics. Finally, *The Medead* is an epic work for theater that developed over a decade. If the first two pieces investigate address principally as an exchange between two people, *The Medead* activates the potential of many voices, in unison, in harmony, and in discord. Each of the works exists in published text as well as visual and audio documents. I approach them through both close reading of the text and analysis of the documents to try and think of these works as simultaneously poetic and performed. Templeton writes in her afterward to *YOU–The City* that writing, directing, and performing are equally important to her and “the combination is the meeting of logos and eros.”¹⁷ Even more interesting are the ways this distinction isn’t absolute: Templeton’s work offers just as much insight into the erotics of text and the logistics of performance.

To invoke some of this multi-dimensionality, I structure this chapter through a series of texts excavated — to use the phrase Templeton used in describing to me her method of writing *The Medead* — from a conversation with Templeton in June 2022 in the café of the Centre for Contemporary Art in Glasgow. These texts pull out key ideas that emerged in that conversation, and also draw on the possibilities of the syntactical weirdness of speech as it is spoken. An important comment from Templeton’s conversation with me is that syntactic interference plays differently when it is spoken than when it is read. Someone saying something makes it feel more likely they *would* say it like that. Here, I play with the opposite effect, using scraps of speech as it was spoken to destabilize the interview format. I heighten

17 Fiona Templeton, *YOU–The City* (Roof Books, 1990), 140.

this by placing the transcribed text within a different register of text composed not arbitrarily but through a method of intuitive association. The effect is intended to be a kind of sense emerging from what seems to be, if not nonsense, then language missing or bouncing off the target of meaning.

Finally, at the end of this essay, I return to my desire to account for the forms of address that underpin the collaborations at the heart of sonic detection and this book. I put my engagements with Templeton and her work in conversation with my own attempts to think through communication and collaborative meaning-making that have arisen through the development of sonic detection as a method and practice.

Conversation II: Logistics & Procedure

A conversation fixed in time, having happened once has always happened. Quiet self-consciousness of this is better than it looks. Chunk it out in blocks. The present froths and we spit yards of smooth tempers framing obstacles on a silver horizon like theater as medium for likelihood. In some ways I really enjoyed being ventrally external illustrating, but yeah. Dance for strangers, exhilaration not incidental but structurally relevant, so I have no expectation that we'll cover anything, everything. Logistics and procedure is where we start, I say. I've brought some headings. A theme or orientation in your work. Did I say orientation? She says, there was the idea of address and speaking very directly to somebody and involving very directly. And the other idea was about a real place. To experience something as if it was real life, but it definitely wasn't. But not to impose an identity. How do you make each person individual but there's more of them. With reality there's always more. The flowcharts—I like to look at stuff like that. So precisely and rigorously figured out and careful and absolutely slips away from and slides out of view of this management. The late 1980s in New York City, a political thing going on, the city is under pressure. Top down management and actual bodies slipping and sliding out of that. The idea of subverting where they were and what they thought

happened there, what was the piece and what wasn't. If I chose to make this table a stage set, I might not think of the milk jug or this weird, slightly tacky surface, or whatever, because real life just has more. There's a difference between getting into a Mercedes and getting into sort of just somebody's car—with leopard-skin seat covers and beer bottles rolling around on the floor. *Maybe zoom out? a little bit then.* The content can be very flexible, as long as you're caught up to the structure. *Procedures that undo themselves or that obscure themselves.* He wanted the work to be about exposing a structure. I thought that the structure could allow certain things to happen. And I was interested in looking at them.

you—The City

YOU—The City is an exploded close-up view on the possibilities of intimate address, a play written and produced to mobilize the structural necessities and real-world contingencies of one person speaking directly to another. All of the spoken text circulates around the word “you,” and is delivered by a single performer to a single audience member in a range of locations across the city in which it is staged.¹⁸ I use the word “delivered” deliberately here as one of the key insights of the work is to frame language logistically, to take a microscopic view on the mechanism of direct address as a way to highlight how language functions precisely in the act of exchange where meaning is made. It is the focus on the made dimension of communication that gives the work its lasting interest and relevance to this current inquiry. This landmark work in Templeton's career was first

18 Though the audience member or “client” meets a series of different performers through the course of the show, this one-to-one interaction is in fact complicated at a few key points. There is a series of scenes inside an apartment with multiple performers entering and exiting in which there are two audience members/clients—a kind of abstract, deconstructed French farce. As well, there is a climactic scene in a playground in which two clients are left alone with each other, though only one client knows that this is what is happening.

produced in 1988 in New York City, with further iterations in London, the Hague, Zurich, Munich, Ljubljana, and Rotterdam. *YOU–The City* was published in book form in 1990 by New York poetry press Roof Books.

Unlike some other environmental theater productions of the same period, *YOU–The City* does not cast the audience in a specific role, though the piece introduces its own terminology for audience members, referring to them as “clients.” The relationship between performer and client emerges not from an enveloping fiction, but in the space created by a heightened attention to the situation of direct address. This situation is constructed from the poetics of text spoken in a specific and dynamic location, so while the text may remain more or less stable, the circumstance of its utterance and reception are always changing. The text is abstract but not without referents. In the printed text, the performers are designated by both a letter and a name that indicates not character but archetypal role, so Performer C is also the “Consumed Consumer,” Performer F is the “Excommunicado Confessor,” and Performer I is actually three performers, all occupying the position of “I” until they shift into “Her,” “He,” and “It.” Within the spoken text, too, there are references to the sites in which the encounters are taking place — the “Consumed Consumer” responds to advertising slogans visible in Times Square, for example, which was then able to be adapted as the play toured to other locations. More oblique hints of other contexts and experiences can also be found. Act III, Scene i is a dialogue between two performers, a shift in the performer-to-client structure of the play found largely elsewhere. This exchange occurs:

11: Can I show you a hiding? I taught you how to speak.

12: You taught me to play words. I’m lost in your games. Running scared in your trenches.

11: And they’re all at the supper, and the apostle Peter says, it cannae be me, Lord, and the guid Lord says, naw, it’s no

you Peter, and the beloved John says, it widnae be me, wid it Lord, and the Lord says, naw, it's no you, son, and the foul traitor himself speaks up and says, I say, old boy, is it I?¹⁹

Suggestions of father/child power struggles operating at the level of language recall without directly referencing a psychoanalytic interpretive framework, while at the same time the insertion of Scots dialect into the Biblical scene, with a punchline delivered in a movie-villain version of posh English, might be understood as simultaneously calling on and caricaturing Templeton's own background. Here, the abstraction of the text is a result of its intertextual density. Yet in spite of this wealth of relationships, throughout the play the text also purposefully frustrates the possibility of reference. Consider the first line of Act I, Scene v from the "Excommunicado Confessor" delivered outside St. Luke's Church on 46th Street, a location that would seem to invite association. The performer says, "If you can't know if you mustn't ask, why look?" The shift from (not-)knowing to (not-)asking to (not-)looking is constructed so that the dependent relationships between conditional clauses collapse in the final question, as attempts to force it into sense falter. How does the question of looking follow from not knowing whether asking is forbidden? It's not a question to be resolved but an effect of meaning to be considered. Ultimately, then, meaning both proliferates and evaporates in the situations of direct address that Templeton constructs. It is proposed as a process, a set of possibilities that may or may not be actualized.

All of this linguistic wrangling places *YOU-The City* in a context of poetic experimentation happening in North America when the play was produced, which prominently included concerns about the sonic or heard dimension of written language.²⁰ Reading the text now, however, I'm struck by the dis-

19 Templeton, *YOU-The City*, 73.

20 See, for example, Charles Bernstein, ed. *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (Oxford University Press, 1998). Bernstein is a key figure in North American avant-garde poetry and edited the influential magazine *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* (1978–1981).

junction between the interpretations I have made above, and what I imagine I might have made if I had been a client, if I had been addressed by a performer speaking these texts. There is video documentation from the work which helps reconstruct this experience, including a video work that casts the camera in the role of the client. I watch the “Consumed Consumer” speak to the camera and get a sense of how the text “makes” a different kind of sense when it is heard out loud than when it is read — the syntactical quirks do sound more “likely” when someone actually says them. At the same time, the printed text offers a dimension that the video recording does not. In her afterword to the book, Templeton writes that “In *YOU*, the Aristotelian unities became logistic rather than narrative concerns.”²¹ In other words, action, time and place are continuous (if not singular) not for representational effect but because of practical necessity. The book version of *YOU–The City* is particularly interesting for its focus on these practicalities — everything that would be necessary if I were to be in the position of addressee.

There are two appendices to the published version of *YOU–The City*. The second appendix is titled “Notes to the Directions (On Structure)” and it addresses in minute detail the logistics of producing a five-act play in which each scene takes place in a different location in a geographically bounded but certainly unpredictable section of a major city. Logistics are fundamentally a question of movement, and the script breaks the movement of the piece into two categories: “client flow” and “performer shuttles.” The first kind of movement refers to the journey each individual audience member or “client” takes across the play — how they get from one place to another and the kinds of encounters they have along the way. “Performer shuttles,” the second kind of movement, designates the more complicated choreography required to facilitate the first kind of movement. Each performer-client encounter has a starting point and ending point that are geographically distant and strictly timed, and the performer must be back at the starting point by the time the next

21 Templeton, *YOU–The City*, 141.

client arrives. All of this is taking place at a time before mobile phones were in use, so there is a system of “monitor performers” who relay messages via payphone and word of mouth. The appendix includes flow charts indicating how this all happens at a minute-by-minute level.

This revelation of process and performance infrastructure is unique to the printed text of *YOU–The City*; encountering the work as an audience member/client would mean that the logistics were invisible or as invisible as possible. Of course, in any live situation, mistakes and unexpected glitches will occur — Templeton told me the story of one performance of the play in Rotterdam where the car used to convey clients to their next encounter, which also constitutes an encounter itself, broke down. The performer got hold of a bicycle and was able to perform the scene for the rest of the evening by transporting the clients on two wheels instead of four. In cases like this, infrastructure becomes visible in its failure. It was not, however, the point of the piece as it was performed to draw attention to the mechanism by which the production was achieved. Rather, it was by choosing to include the flowcharts, the written instructions, the vocabularies of practicality and exigency, and the failsafe plans in the book version of the play, that Templeton foregrounds how the poetic strategies of the spoken text must be considered within the context in which they are meant to be delivered. She shows what kind of elaborate apparatus must be implemented and continuously and collaboratively maintained, revised, and reinvented for one person to address another as “you.”

The first appendix is “Notes to the Directions (On Performance)” and it focuses on performance style, which in this piece is necessarily also connected with how each performer contributes to and is affected by the wider ecology of the piece. Instead of psychological motivation or other character-driven advice, we read about the intended power dynamic within each role, and each performer’s responsibility in terms of guiding the client through their discreet section of the unfolding experience. The “Excommunicado Confessor” is told that their speech should be “intoned rather than discursive,” and then more speculatively,

“Your ‘you’ is also ‘You,’ though You might be ‘Them’ to you. You want to tell them.”²² The “Mirror of Forgetfulness” should “take the client out of him or herself.”²³ There is an attention to the quality of interaction here, to the ways a performer might direct their thoughts and actions towards a particular mode of exchange, which could always potentially collapse or transform given the unpredictability of the encounter. This kind of attention is as integral to the infrastructure of the piece as the flow charts and diagrams.

I read these appendices, along with the commentary, notes, anecdotes, and other accompanying texts, which are as substantial as the spoken text in the book, as fundamental to the poetics of the work and to its investigation of the charged dynamics of direct address. The openness of the identity of “you” at the heart of the piece is made possible by the performance apparatus indicated by these complex texts. At the same time, in other of Templeton’s works, which I will consider next, the malleability of the subject of language is perhaps more closely connected to the vulnerabilities of the specific bodies that produce language as meaningful, together. This connection is certainly suggested within *YOU–The City*, not least in Templeton’s choice of epigraph to the text, a line from the first poem of Paul Celan’s 1963 collection *Die Niemandrose*. It reads “O einer, o keiner, o niemand, o du.” Translated in the collected edition of Celan’s early work as “O one, o no one, o noone, o you,” the line modulates between profound absence and intimacy, while suggesting violence at the evacuation of personality from the addressee.²⁴ What happens when “you” are “no one”? Odysseus craftily escapes the Cyclops by calling himself “nobody,” but in the Celan poem, the haunting presence of Nazi death camps and the lingering context of postwar German antisemitism, along with the poet’s own psychic struggles, make it impossible to

²² Ibid., 34.

²³ Ibid., 18.

²⁴ Paul Celan, *Memory Rose into Threshold Speech: The Collected Early Poetry, A Bilingual Edition*, trans. Pierre Joris (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2020), 245.

read “no one” and “you” together without hearing a resonance of brutality.²⁵ In the next piece of work by Templeton I consider, the stakes of address between two people under conditions of brutal loss emerge at the core.

Conversation III: Relation

On and off or really in and out, a distinction not with substance but consequence of ordered waiting. Tempted to throw line, forever willing but able — ordinary sneaker time is ultimate. No more units until units blossom. Blips in the radon although homophones are the sincerest form of what comes next. Pleasantry matters. We could run this through something: There are other ways to generate poetry machines. Precisely unique so who cares if the original daddy. Daddy what comes next. Relation is next, the title of your. Yes. She says, **little ways of never assuming what the relationship is.** Relationships emergent in the moment and relationships between thought and text and how they circulate. The use of the word “you,” how it didn’t always mean the other person but sometimes meant, “the use of the word ‘you’” — that’s a lot going on for someone to process. // It was quite a strange thing for me to be writing something for someone else, to say you had a very profound experience I couldn’t be having. // She heard her voice or her word was powerful in ways that couldn’t be contained. I was aware of wanting to access different language in different ways. // But most people’s language is much more. They just see it as language moving about. All this has to make sense because they’re saying it to me. // A Joyce translator, a translator who was also a radio announcer. A translator in Switzerland delighted to put scenes in Swiss German because he said theater is always in High German there. A translator of poetry. We took the language apart.

25 Pierre Joris, “Commentary,” in Paul Celan, *Memory Rose Into Threshold Speech*, trans. Pierre Joris (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2020), 454.

Recognition

The final line of *Recognition* (subtitled “a poetic play”) reads: “And after? Death is an utter change of meaning.”²⁶ It is one of the more categorical lines in a work characterized, like much of Templeton’s writing, by the oblique and by syntactic short-circuits. Typically, though, the line is multi-layered and unresolved. The play is a collaboration between Templeton and the performer Michael Ratomski, who died during its creation. It is a solo duet, with Ratomski appearing on video as Templeton performs live. Twelve members of the audience are arranged in the space as a “jury,” tasked implicitly with bearing witness and making consequential interpretations, though importantly, there is no judge to finalize these acts. The text is punctuated by a series of dreams “narrated” by Templeton, though they take a range of forms that depart from conventional narratives, even for dreams. The first dream, and the play itself, opens with the question, “Why am I asking a question?”²⁷ The second dream is a song sung to the tune of “The Farmer Wants a Wife” that begins straightforwardly but dissolves to include lyrics like “If all the sea were paper this song *might* wipe my eyes.”²⁸ The third dream tells the story of the blind prophet Tiresias, how he lived life as both a man and a woman, and how he was punished by a god for giving the wrong answer. The fourth and final dream is composed entirely of the line about death mentioned above.

How is death an utter change of meaning? Is this a definition, a speculation, or an observation? Who or what is the subject of death in these terms? The line might suggest that to experience death is to experience a shift in the capacity to make meaning, so utterly that it ceases entirely, though this may be a speculation too far. Less esoterically, the change might be found in relationships. Death shifts the meaning we hold and make for

26 Fiona Templeton, “Recognition: A Poetic Play,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 23, no. 3 (2001): 121.

27 *Ibid.*, 104.

28 *Ibid.*, 107.

one another — it reorders not just the future but the past. Death determines that we will have been different to one another. This recourse to the future perfect is supported by Templeton, in the line that comes directly after the first line of the play: “I’m giving you a memory to will have had to will have known the answer I’ll tell you.” It is in response to the opening line, which I reference above: “Why am I asking a question?”²⁹ A question about the purpose of questions leads to a response whose syntax pre-emptly the expected sequence of the Q&A. You will have had the answer, if you don’t already.

All of this suggests another interpretation of what kinds of changes death might be or bring about. Death changes language, the medium of meaning. *Recognition* seems to suggest that death changes not only what we mean to each other but how we make meaning together. In writing death collaboratively, Templeton and Ratowski show the radical disconnect that emerges as Ratowski approaches his own death.³⁰ As Templeton said in her conversation with me, she was writing in response to “a very profound experience [she] couldn’t be having.” At the same time, and perhaps even more radically, the piece shows what happens to language under extreme challenges to communication. Where orderly conventions of exchange are halted, Templeton employs poetic strategies to intervene at the level of the sentence (“But to have and to head-hold, too, buffets air home with another cheek”), and to traverse allusion and reference (in Act IV, for example, dialogue between “Michael” and “Fiona” alternates between technical details about the effects on the immune system of HIV and reference to the Biblical angel Michael). Perhaps even the unsayable will be verbalized, but not without stretching, transforming, squeezing, and bruising the terms of speech.

29 Ibid., 104.

30 The writing is collaborative in the sense that the text emerged from exchanges between Templeton and Ratowski, though Templeton is the sole author.

The question of address, direct and indirect, takes on particular complications under these conditions. The “You” in *YOU–The City* was constructed to be an open space, scaffolded by complex logistic and performance infrastructures, that could be activated in real time as each individual client-performer exchange literally enlivened the text with physical presence. The “you” in *Recognition* is pre-conditioned by the specific relationship between the two performers and by the network of factors, including political and historical factors, that produce this relationship. As noted above, the work makes explicit reference to the biological mechanism of HIV, though it does not engage directly with activism of the time by groups like ACT-UP. Nevertheless, the question of meaning staged here — not meaning as such but the particular ways that we mean something to each other — has a politics. The artist and activist Gregg Bordowitz writes, “there is no reason that explains AIDS.” He clarifies that there are, of course “historical, material conditions that create a situation of crisis.”³¹ But there is no external teleology or metaphysical moral harmony underlying the distribution of illness and death and it is important to resist this kind of mythologizing. On the other hand, Bordowitz writes, “there is no reason, but there is meaning. My experiences are filled with meaning.”³² I am suggesting here that *Recognition* is dedicated to the construction of meaning as situated and in progress, embodied and subject to error, but also more capacious than convention might allow.

I feel my distance from the performed instance of this work keenly — work that is itself based on both intensifying and collapsing distances between the two performers and the audience. The printed script names the characters the same as the people who performed them: “Michael” and “Fiona.” Mediation emerges from the text as a heightened theatrical mechanism, as “Michael” is described as appearing on a television screen, moved and manipulated by “Fiona.” The limitations of this

31 Gregg Bordowitz, *The AIDS Crisis Is Ridiculous and Other Writings: 1986–2003* (MIT Press, 2006), 48.

32 Ibid.

kind of address are deliberately pointed to when, for example, “Fiona” attempts to give “Michael” a glass of water through the screen. As the water drips onto the stage, audience members are confronted by a disjunction between temporally flexible exchanges of language and loss framed as the impossibility of simultaneity. Or at least that is the reaction I imagine. Templeton’s critical writing on the work becomes particularly valuable here, not because it explains her intentions but because it creates a framework for accessing the specific relationship this work has to its theatrical medium. In an essay on *Recognition* for a collection titled *Multi-Media: Video — Installation — Performance*, Templeton uses her sensitivity to the frayed edges of things as a way to evoke theatricality as a negotiation between agents that is always vulnerable. The text is punctuated by examples of instances where the mediation fails, glitches because of human error or technological limitations: “After the first performance of the work, the venue lost the videotape document”³³; “The pictures are too dark. The image is too far away. The pictures are too small. You can’t see him.”³⁴ Even more interestingly, she writes about the weird proximities that the stage and screen together afford: “Onstage live, I play him onstage on video playing himself or another. Onstage live I play myself onstage on video playing myself with him.”³⁵ The use of video heightens the existing theatrical mechanism which already simultaneously distances and brings together speaker, spoken, and spoken-to. Address is then understood as refraction, which does not mean that meaning is not made but that it is constantly being remade. One of the consequences of this is a tension — not unique to the use of the televisual but here emphasized by it — in the shift from speaking to, to speaking for.

33 Fiona Templeton, “Medium, Remedy, Mortality, Fiction, Acting, Absence, Capture, Loss, Recognition,” in *Multi-Media: Video — Installation — Performance*, ed. Nick Kaye (Routledge, 2007), 3.

34 *Ibid.*, 7.

35 *Ibid.*, 5.

Speaking for Michael, moving for him. For me. Pretending he's there, speaking to and with the image, discussing him, him alone, him on screen with me, him acting, him reading, him speaking, me alone, the jury reading my letter to him. Michael onstage, at home, in hospital, on videotape.³⁶

There is an ethic in this movement that is implied without being fully resolved. "Michael" extends into the theatrical space, performs, addresses, is addressed, while Ratomski himself is gone. *Recognition* in a sense literalizes an idea that death is experienced as a tangible presence and that we continue to form and shape one another beyond our own lifetimes. The performance makes use of techniques and technologies to dramatize — without mystifying — this interpenetration. Templeton, for example, sees a continuity between Ratomski's extension into the televisual realm and the catheter which extends his bodily functions into a machine. At the same time, it is the finitude of the live body in performance — these live bodies in performance — that also fuels this work. The primacy of disjunction, both within the text and in Templeton's account of the performance, figures address as absolutely conditioned by its limitations. However, in pressing on those limits, other things become possible. In an interview with theater scholar Andrew Quick, Templeton describes what it felt like to perform *Recognition* shortly after Ratomski's death, in tones not of somber mourning but a strange kind of exhilaration that is so striking it is worth quoting at length. She notes that when someone close to you dies, "your whole relationship to the world is different." She continues:

It is a very privileged position because you are looking at a sort of opening in the existential assumptions that are normally made. [...] It was very exciting to negotiate. It was one of the most exciting moments of my life, actually. But this experience was also about how meaning can change utterly and I think I was having sudden insights into making mean-

³⁶ Ibid.

ing — every gesture, every tiny gesture, or each word became about the construction of meaning. This is something that has been very interesting to me for a long time because I always wonder how much you need in order to communicate something. And I actually have always thought you need very little that's familiar. You only need certain points of reference and all the rest can be new, in order to give people enough to construct something in common with you.³⁷

This expression of excitement does not, I don't think, reduce the horror of Ratomski's illness but rather takes seriously the idea that meaning not only can extend beyond conventional boundaries but does so regularly — that the possibilities for how we can mean together are greater than we know, and that performance is a compelling space for evidencing this fact.

Conversation IV: Place

Placeholder text inserts of intermediate value chains. Empty rhythm containment to find upwards devotion. Wingspan templates but not so you'd verify. Pleasure takes in the peripheral vision because what we think of as openness is happening behind you. Anger clarifies. A time of sickness is a fitted plane, just about slotting in until you know how it goes. Timelapse photography is the sincerest form of overnight delivery. Time and again we clean your teeth of the organizational change in stylistic volumes. Real place is always so much more. I've been thinking about a distinction between the site-specific and the situated. Or maybe embedded. I like embedded. People who were actually in that street all the time, it became very visible to them, because they'd see it going past. I felt that those people were performers. // Not everybody who told me a dream wanted to perform or do anything else, but it felt like much more coming out of the place. // They would experience the dream the way

37 Andrew Quick, "Resisting Memorialisation: An Interview with Fiona Templeton," *Performance Research* 5, no. 3 (2000): 120.

the person had dreamed it. // There are certain situations, if you just find yourself there, you know what your role is. // She says, I got so many dreams. I got almost 500 dreams.

The Medead

The multiple, the polyvocal, and the indirect assertion all structure *The Medead*, Templeton's decade-long project adapting the classic Greek work. If the previous two works have made bold and complex gestures in the circuitous channels between "you" and "I," *The Medead* finds form in the resonance among "us" and "them." The multiplicity here is matched by how the project unfolded over time, having begun its development in 2000, with public showings and workshops over the next ten years culminating in a "full" production in 2012 at Roulette in Brooklyn, and the publication of the text in 2014. Theater scholar Geraldine Harris wrote about *The Medead* in 2004, when Templeton was a research fellow at the University of Lancaster. The essay is framed as a "preview" of the work and uses Harris's position as witness to its unfolding to think about it alongside Jacques Derrida and deconstruction. Drawing particularly on Jacques Derrida's *Dissemination* (1981), she argues that *The Medead* offers an approach to intertextuality that "produce[s] a 'dissemination' of meaning around Euripedes' 'original' that remarks its positioning within a process of iterability so as to challenge its status as 'originary.'"³⁸ This proliferation of meaning leads to something distinctive, even "whole." It is this notion of the coherence in difference that I want to pursue further.

In Templeton's *Medead*, the title role is played by six different women of a range of ages. There are two choruses—one, "Chorus," comments directly on the action close to the mode of the traditional Greek chorus, and the other, "Birds," provides continuous sonic texture, echoes, oral punctuation, and other

38 Geraldine Harris, "Foreshadowings and After Blows: Fiona Templeton's *The Medead* (in progress)," *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 23, no. 3 (2004): 166.

kinds of acoustic swarming. The make-up of these collective bodies is permeable: As performers come into and out of the voices of named characters they emerge from and return to the vocal crowd. If the previous two works I have considered in this chapter have examined in close detail the possibilities, evasions, contradictions, and complex mechanics of address from one to another, *The Medead* functions through linguistic dispersal and diffusion. Collective address is meticulously rendered, both in performance and publication. On the page, the different voices — and different categories of voices — cascade vertically in multiple columns, so that the orientation of reading is shifted from the conventional directionality of the Latin alphabet, left-to-right and top-to-bottom. Instead, I try to read with a kind of simultaneity, my eyes jumping back and forth, attempting to reproduce a sense of all-at-once. Later, I watch a video recording of the production of the work in 2012. Here, the spatial arrangement of text gives way to its temporal possibilities as recitation, chanting, and song enliven the spoken words, undergirded by the virtuosic composition and performance of Samita Sinha who created for the work a “six-part contemporary raga cycle, partly following the cycle of the day.”³⁹

Narrative plays a role in *The Medead* that it has not in the previous two works I’ve considered. It both structures and complicates the collective voicing that I am tracing. The audience is addressed directly, periodically, with present-tense statements of narrative: “Orpheus offers the trousseau of knives in exchange for Medea’s weapons”;⁴⁰ “Alcestis, later rejected from hell in disgust by Persephone for thinking her life not worth her husband’s, tries to rejuvenate her father Pelias.”⁴¹ Sometimes these narrative interjections build on one another in a compositional mode. In Act I, Part 2, Orpheus tells us “Medea wants a child in winter,”⁴² then later, “Medea wants a child in spring,”

39 Fiona Templeton, *The Medead: An Epic of Medea* (Roof Books, 2014), 271.

40 Ibid., 39.

41 Ibid., 145.

42 Ibid., 95.

and so on, the maternal desires of this famous filicide taking on the quality of the chorus of a song.⁴³ There is not a single narrator but instead this function is distributed across the cast and indicated in the text by boldface. This turn to storytelling provides the scaffolding for a very different register of language, represented on the page in a column titled “TEXT.” A column to the left, titled “SPEAKERS” distributes this text amongst the characters named in the narrative. However, the words they speak stray from the storytelling mode. In Act I, Part 1B, a line in bold reads “**Aetes leads Jason to the bullring of task,**” and as both a reader and viewer I am conditioned to expect the performers to act out what happens next — to speak *as* Aetes and Jason as the story unfolds. Instead, the words glance off conventional sense, skimming it without submerging. The exchange that follows between Aetes, Jason, and Medea reads this way:

Jason:	let's go
Medea:	no I'll die
Aetes:	sigmix
Jason:	no I'm gone no
Medea:	and sense deud
Aetes:	rehear
Jason:	a bremer
Medea:	deud
Aetes:	conthicted

Neologisms butt up against assertions that could just about fit with my understanding of a family row, but not quite. Yet in reading, and even more in watching and listening, relationships between these characters/performers/speakers do form. I feel something — not for the characters, in the sense of identifying with them and their situation — but more as a kind of blowback, a residual spray.

Templeton describes the method she used to generate the text in an essay titled “Speaking for Performance/Writing with

43 Ibid., 99.

the Voice.” This involved speaking into a tape recorder, using her voice as a compositional tool, and finding new ways to “think in language,” a method that was created partly as a way to deal with the difficulty of addressing a cultural monolith like *Medea*.⁴⁴ This solitary activity may seem at odds with the point I am making about collective address, but Templeton notes how this method arose precisely as a negotiation with address. She references an essay by Heinrich von Kleist that she had previously translated, “On the gradual production of thought through speaking,” in which he articulates the importance of an addressee to the speaker. For Templeton, the tape recorder became a kind of prosthetic addressee, a prompt for imagining any number or kinds of listeners. Even more, the method became a way to distribute her own singularity, to populate her speech with multiple points of reference “[a]s ‘voices’ or trains of thought replied to or interrupted each other.”⁴⁵ Here, the question of lyric subjectivity is at the forefront. As I mention in the first section of this chapter, the lyric tradition is characterized by a notion of poetics as a singular and self-contained voice. The voice might address either itself or an idealized “you,” “overheard” by the reader, as articulated in the nineteenth century by John Stuart Mill (whom we quote in the prologue to “Necessary Note”).⁴⁶ The coherence and self-absorption of the lyric subject, as I also discuss above, has been thoroughly interrogated and dismantled over the past century. Here, Templeton’s practice is to position her own voice as produced through multiplicity and polyphony, a strategy informed by earlier poetic interventions.

In the “Speaking for Performance” essay, Templeton references the poet Hannah Weiner, whose work explicitly complicates the possibilities of the singular speaking subject of poet-

44 Fiona Templeton, “Speaking for Performance/Writing with the Voice,” in *Sensualities/Textualities and Technologies: Writings of the Body in 21st Century Performance*, ed. Susan Broadhurst and Josephine Machon (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 178.

45 Ibid.

46 John Stuart Mill, “Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties,” *The Crayon* 7, no. 4 (1860): 93–97.

ics.⁴⁷ Weiner was considered a forerunner of Language poetics, an avant-garde movement specifically characterized by a rejection of lyric unity. In Weiner's *Clairvoyant Journal*, which Templeton references, she uses a kind of collage technique to delagate what Patrick Durgin describes as "autonomous authorial agency."⁴⁸ Weiner's work is often read with reference to episodes of psychosis she experienced, and Durgin, without reductively pathologizing the work, brings a disability theory lens to her production as a way to argue that her work demands a reconfiguration of how we think about subjects as such. He positions her work as a limit case for thinking "madness" as "a critical concept that allows the discourses of disability and poetics to generate newly ethical ways of authorizing subjects."⁴⁹ While Templeton's work operates in a very different register, she is also invested in expanding how agency is thought — not as the property of an individual alone but occurring between people, environments, relationships.

As I have argued throughout, Templeton's poetics are continuous with her performance commitments, and the collision of lyric subjectivity, anti-lyric critique, and the present body of performance is heightened in *The Medead*. It is not so much that she rejects the "I" of lyric poetry as it is that she stages "I" as a plural pronoun. Act II, Part 4 — "Medea in Colchis" — is the part of the play where Medea kills her children, one of the most famous acts in European theater, which of course takes place off stage in the Euripedes. In *The Medead*, the text is flecked with reference to the act of violence: "a long husband / a pale husband / dwells distinguished in his every clo-ak,"⁵⁰ and "one day a little ip sip tip / the likes of / suffering / not you / til he's dead / and pretty images amused him," and "I whirl you with

47 Templeton, "Speaking for Performance/Writing with the Voice."

48 Hannah Weiner, *Clairvoyant Journal 1974: March–June Retreat* (Angel Hair Books, 1978), and Patrick F. Durgin, "Psychosocial Disability and Post-Ableist Poetics: The 'Case' of Hannah Weiner's *Clairvoyant Journals*," *Contemporary Women's Writing* 2, no. 2 (2008): 150.

49 Durgin, "Psycho-Social Disability and Post-Ableist Poetics," 150.

50 Templeton, *Medead*, 167.

one arm yes you're the last one / no I'm not letting go."⁵¹ As ever, though, a sequential explanation of actions and consequences is not forthcoming. The entire theater has been reoriented for this scene. Up until this point, both in the video recording and in the instructions in the text, the audience has been distributed around the theater space, sitting and lying on the floor with performers moving between them. Then there is an interval, and the audience returns to sit in rows facing a proscenium stage. Medea is the lone "character," and she does not address and is not addressed by anyone else. However, the Chorus and Birds still contribute to the sonic and verbal texture of the performance space. Nobody else but Medea is responsible for the murders that I intuit from the words I hear and read, from my specific knowledge of the play and my ambient cultural understanding. At the same time, Medea does not cohere as a purely singular agent, but here comes into her individuality through a series of acts of relation. The extreme violence of these acts should dispel the idea that an understanding of subjectivity emerging from interdependence is necessarily peaceful, nourishing, or sustaining. Rather, following Durgin's argument above, it suggests a different kind of ethical framework required to account for the mutuality that structures the "self." In tracing Templeton's poetics and performance of address, I find rigorous attention and inventive accounts of precisely this mutuality.

Conversation V: Poetics & Performance

Alight from here, whose lower surface is a deep impression in the soft edge. Why would I obscure myself? Louder and louder, as if attention politics weren't quantifiable. We're here because we're hair because we're higher than we meant to go. It's one thing to bathe in the emerald waters of the ever-lasting present and another to count down from sixty in a position of fifty-nine. Mine is a voice that tolerates echoes and yours is a carton full of air. If anyone asks, we're alive. I've been thinking about

⁵¹ Ibid., 175.

your work and the lyric subject and the way that is dissolved or challenged. Thinking a little bit about the speaker — the actual speaker and the other one. She says, one thing about the actual speaker and the lyric subject is, that's why I like using other performers, so that it's not about centralized voice. It's voice rather than self. A little conflict that I really appreciate. You didn't have to get rid of the lyric "I." You can use it in different ways rather than make it claim its place. Which is not to say that I don't want to say something because I've got quite a lot to say. And I say that I want to wrap up the conversation by talking about the lyric subject in poetry and the present body in performance. The prevailing problems of performance and poetics. She says, there's a piece I did called *The Blue*. There are two speakers, and it starts off very individual. And what gradually happens is the two voices start to ventriloquize each other, take on each other's voices. So even though there are two strong "I's," who the "I" is and who the "you" is become quite slippery. It's deliberately subverting gender, and not just gender, but power relationships. So when I say I don't want to avoid asking what the "I" is, but what else can you do with it? Diffuse like not in a vague way but just, it can have a lot of sites within it. I ask, is there anything you feel like I've missed? And she thinks and says, that kind of accessing of not just different voices but also drives and the sub-conscious. I wanted to try using that poetically and harnessing it. Hear phrases as entering the scene then seek some words. So, the words were populating the thing, and I would try and catch them. There was this field of language and images that I was trying to find my way around. And I thought, how do I? Because some of these are speaking in a very particular way. Some of it is very straightforward, some of it is very syntactically odd. And I started talking to these other bits of language and that produced this kind of dialogue. It became three-dimensionalized. Multiple people and multiple voices. So rather than saying, I'm speaking in multiple voices — well these multiple voices are just speaking.

Conclusion

This essay started with a subterranean discomfort with writing in the first person and a desire to put pressure on modes of address as part of the wider project of articulating methods and practices that I/we(/you?) might call sonic detection. At stake in this discomfort and desire is, perhaps, a question about what happens when we meet the world from which we are never separate. In the “Stolen Voices” section of this book, we quote Adriana Cavarero, who writes about “a reciprocal intention to listen, one that is already active in the vocal emission, and that reveals and communicates everyone to the other.”⁵² For Cavarero, utterance, being, and reciprocity are fundamentally intertwined. I am trying, here, to trace a mechanism of encounter that is sensitive to these imbrications, by putting the collaborative and ongoing investigation that Rebecca and I are continuously constructing in contact with Fiona Templeton’s poetic and performative inventions. Templeton’s work not only speaks to questions about collaborative meaning-making at the heart of this book, but also offers reorientations that haven’t been critically appraised in as much depth as they might be. I hope in some ways that this essay also invites further exploration.

The three works I have examined here — *YOU–The City, Recognition*, and *The Medead* — represent a complex set of practices operating at the edges of sense and sensibility. I started by thinking about how Templeton builds and reveals a logistics of meaning in the first work. I read the publication for *YOU–The City* as a schematic for everything that has to happen in the background, often invisibly or inaudibly, for direct address to take place. I also read it as a demonstration of how slippages and misalignments are necessary conditions for exchange. Considering the text and the performance documentation together, I find a productive collapsing of possibility into plausibility, a kind of backward logic where the fact of someone saying something makes

52 Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford University Press, 2005), 5.

it more likely that they would say that thing. Meaning as mutual refusal to allow meaning not to happen. In *Recognition*, I consider how Templeton pushes the construction of meaning into the realm of the impossible, dealing with what emerges through pressing on limits. Far from an abstract proposition, Templeton brings the actuality of death and dying into a conversation about what and how we mean to each other. Finally, in *The Medead*, I find dispersal and diffusion. Here is a manifestation of the first-person subject position as plural and distributed that requires a shift in ethical thinking in order to account for agency and the responsibility we bear towards each other. Taken together, these three works help me understand address as a machine for meaning, inefficient and resource-intensive, but also capable of conjuring proximity across impossible distance. In my representation of my conversation with Templeton, I've tried to highlight both proximity and distance, distance in proximity and affinity in disjunction.

Meaning in utterance isn't the only line of investigation we pursue as sonic detectives. We are as interested in the sensorial as we are in sense. Even more, though, we are interested in the interpenetration of these modes and the noisy conditions through which exchange and encounter are conjured. This essay has aimed for a consideration of the logistics of meaning, at the edges not just of meaning's construction, but its delivery and distribution, and methods for frustrating, jamming, short-circuiting, stretching, and realigning it. In other parts of this book—"Necessary Note," "Stolen Voices," and "Dispatches"—we seek out voices that help us understand expanded infrastructures for exchange that take in the micro-dynamics of contact between two people, and the large-scale systems that materially produce, reproduce, and constrain how we can address ourselves to each other and the world. In this essay, I have turned to a particular intersection of poetry and performance to help expand the repertoire of the sonic detective, to refresh our syntax and gestural range, and to give us new techniques for articulating the possible.

You are prepared, then, to draw some conclusions about these things:

1. All the infrastructure and coordination that makes communication meaningful;
2. The kind of meaning that becomes possible at the limits of address and the way meaning-making is a process that constantly undoes and reconstitutes itself, backward and forward in time;
3. Meaning as necessarily co-constituted between individuals, and individuals as necessarily multiply constituted.

These are some parameters you use to frame your own commitments to artistic research, the practice you call sonic detection. You are in an accumulating fiction, constructed over a decade and counting — a fiction made between you, negotiating perfect control and complete abandon. You have been on strike for X number of days over the past year and your landlord calls you the militant. Your strong, asthmatic body is aging in its own time. You love queer joy. You are singular and “you” is multiple and all of you have a soft center and none of you are off the hook.

We practice saying the same thing at the same time, to blend our voices into one. There are microscopic mites in our faces, facing evolutionary oblivion. A ceilidh in Aberdeen. A ham broth in Seaham. Time and tide. Countless cream teas. “Yes, thanks, yeah, yeah” in perfect unison, the everyday content of speech made uncanny by weird synchronicity. Yes, we have to do it. The other facilitates boldness and creates an envelope for interiority that we can actually talk about. It’s not that we see ourselves in each other: We listen longer. We get into the zone, which we can only confirm in retrospect, having been in it for some time. Certain episodes take on the status first of anecdote then of evidence. We have just left Lowestoft en route to Newcastle and we are seeking the exact meeting point between control and abandon. Over the years we develop if not personae

then routines, repeated gestures, recurring themes and objects. White chocolate and raspberry scones, orange rubber gear ties, 284 vinyl records, a light blue t-shirt, a jumpsuit, a DVD. The fiction doesn't consume resources but we consume resources in the fiction. Our focused listening produces acute feelings, not the least of which is pleasure.

I am agile and improvisatory, symmetrical, lucid, dulcet, harsh, hoarse, wild, chaotic but with an underlying and immovable logic, harmonic but always a breath away from dissonance. The end of my thought is the beginning of yours and vice versa. Conversation artists. My decisions, insofar as they are mine to make, are oriented towards the construction of a life that is actively in progress and unfolding. The metaphor of an ongoing conversation is superseded by a series of actual ongoing conversations. I don't want to be immersed in my life; I want to participate in it. I want to feel everything and then I want to feel it again, conjured and re-conjured in language and gesture and imagination. Only now I don't feel like talking. It makes me sick to say "I" and I can't say anything else. I am too much myself, too much to myself and also totally unconsolidated. I withdraw. The withdrawal is a condition for conversation which is a condition for thought, each mutually constituting and not sequential. Neither perfectly controlled nor with complete abandon, I seek to keep this going.

OF MOMENTUM AND
MALLEABLE MATERIALS

by Rebecca Collins

May, 2021. I'm in a car, a black Chevrolet Aveo, heading horizontally (not vertically) across the Queensferry Crossing, a three-tower cable-stayed one point five mile road bridge. Dubbed the longest of its kind in the world, this piece of infrastructure usefully connects the Scottish counties of Midlothian to Fife. I have crossed this bridge a number of times, but this particular journey is significant for me. It is the first time I get beyond the five-mile radius of my home in over seven months.¹

I remind myself I'm a sonic detective. This is what I do.

Wait, no.

This is what we do.

We're sonic detectives.

My singular existence in this ton of tin wants to hear these words reverberate around a room filled with scores of others.

Reminder: This is no time for mass gatherings.

Check: Saturday, February 8, 2020. The date of our last gathering at the Center for Contemporary Art in Glasgow. A launch for our first album, *Stolen Voices 001*. A sharing of sonic find-

¹ At the time of writing the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic was ongoing. Rules and regulations varied depending on geographical location and decisions taken by governing bodies. Scotland's first minister Nicola Sturgeon imposed a rule to stay within a five-mile radius of your home to prevent further spread of the virus. This was lifted in July 2020.

ings: dispatches from train stations, hotel lobbies, and site-specific musings from up and down the east coast of the United Kingdom. It felt good. Really good. We had finally assembled the team. There were back slaps, high fives, and a commitment from all present to keep an ear to the ground. We even shook on it.

Right oh.

So, what to do in the meantime?

Detect.

We detect.

We sonically detect.

But what exactly is the sonic in this context?

What is detection?

Time to figure a few things out.

* * *

As I drive over the bridge, my eye is drawn to the tight, straight lines holding this huge structure together. The tension of the wires on the three-tower cable-stayed structure forms a series of parallel lines. I detect a mild vibration from the thrum of traffic as other cars, lorries, and buses accompany me on my travels.

An event of two years ago springs to mind.

I'm in a gallery space. There is a naked female body laid out on a gallery floor covered in a tangle of multi-colored thread. A slither of light shines through a crack in the window. The light reveals six women standing in a tight circle spooling cotton from reels held in their mouths. Hands guide wet thread onto the bare skin of the body below. A gentle squelching sound can be overheard.

Another group, on the other side of the room, sit in a wide circle talking and sharing stories about individual encounters with wild animals. A spider bite marks the shoulder of one, another came face-to-face with a fox, and a bear got caught stealing camembert from a campsite.

A very large free-standing projection screen separates the two spaces. A film plays. It is *The Nightwatch* by Belgian artist

Francis Alÿs. The film documents an action set in motion by the artist whereby a fox gets let loose, after closing time, in the National Portrait gallery in London.

The thread-covered body glistens with fresh spit. An atmosphere of calm surrounds the women and this ritual.

Why *this* event?

Why now?

The work is a reenactment of Brazilian artist Lygia Clark's 1973 *Baba Antropofágica* or *Anthropophagic Slobber*. The event is Proklama No. 13 held at Artium, an arts center in Vitoria-Gasteiz in the Basque country, Spain. The themes for the three-day event are death, change, revolution, chaos, rebellion, opposition, and authority. There are somatic practices to perform on each other. Tarot card readings from a bespoke deck. An experimental film program and, to end the event, an eight kilometer walk from the arts center to AZALA, an artist residency space in Lasierra.

I want to use the reenactment of *Anthropophagic Slobber* to say something about the vibrational potential of bodies, about the potential for one body to affect another, about gut spilling or the dislocation of speech. Overall, I am trying to emphasize how, in the gallery space, there was something profound about the copresence of articulation and disarticulation. And this is important because I am rooting around, trying myself—at this very moment (like now, no now, now)—to say something profound about what Laurent Berlant terms “the friction of copresence.”² The space was shaped by the collective actions of the bodies contained within it. I'm interested in the political potential of these coexistent spaces, in their “infrastructural affect” and the demand to be attentive to the present as it unfolds.³ This is crucial for sonic detection as it is concerned with radical novelty, with the slow emergent transformation of the world we find ourselves in, with the disturbance of the apparent stability of the world, with bodies as events, with dis-

2 Lauren Berlant, *On the Inconvenience of Other People* (Duke University Press, 2022), 10.

3 Ibid., 23.

tortions, with struggles, with challenges, occurring in the present, now, yet that also have connections to the past.

Sonic detection describes a practice of listening long and hard to geographical sites up and down the east coast of the UK, lending an ear, along the way, to archives, to the legacies of site-specific performance, to the lyric, to industries, to infrastructures, to strike action, to labor struggles, to give a contemporary sonic portrait of the United Kingdom now, today, with just an inkling of how we got to where we are now and to uncover why we might feel like we do.

It is messy, entangled, chaotic.

Sometimes abject, often affecting.

Time to summon some joy.

* * *

In what follows I wrest sonic detection from the context of the artistic research project *Stolen Voices* and experiment with distilling the practice into a method for use within the performance studies archive. To do so I engage with the work of Bow Gamelan Ensemble, a trio of British artists — Anne Bean, Paul Burwell, and Richard Wilson — who were active between 1983 and 1990. The group made use of discarded materials and machinery from the postindustrial era to make unusual and unexpected musical gamelans.⁴ Having met at Butler's Wharf Studios in the 1970s, they found common interest and ongoing curiosity in the formation of an assembled junk orchestra.

The majority of publications that reference the work of Bow Gamelan are based on interviews conducted with Wilson and Bean, the surviving members of the former ensemble.⁵ In

4 A gamelan is the term for a traditional musical ensemble in Indonesia and typically consists of musicians playing a series of gongs and metal instruments that are used in ceremonies and rituals.

5 Paul Burwell sadly passed away in 2007. On the work of Bow Gamelan Ensemble, see Jo Joelson, *Library of Light: Encounters with Artists and Designers* (Lund Humphries, 2019). On the contribution of Bow Gamelan to London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT), see Rose de Wend

this instance, rather than turn to those who worked with the materials, I want to let the materials speak for themselves. I'm interested in the texture and sonorous potential of encounters produced by conjoining discarded objects and postindustrial waste, items which, on the surface, might not seem to correlate. I have chosen to work with the documentation from the Special Collections and Archives held at Chelsea College of Art and Design, University of the Arts London, and the University of Bristol Theatre Collection. I was seduced by the drawings, scores, diagrams, lists, performance documents, portfolios, pamphlets, and publications I found there. I felt drawn to the rawness in these artifacts: a latent energy tinged with excitement. This led to a desire to think with these items. I wanted to use them to find another relationship with the Stolen Voices archive to rearticulate the underlying potential resounding within the project. My intention is to let another articulation of Bow Gamelan's work, and Stolen Voices, recirculate. I conceive of this as a practice of listening otherwise. As I write this I hold close the sentiment expressed by Chantal Mouffe, who notes, "every order is the temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices."⁶ My argument builds on Mouffe's notion that, "[t]hings could always be otherwise."⁷ Any articulation of a creative practice is temporary and precarious, contingent on

Fenton and Lucy Neal, *The Turning World: Stories from the London International Festival of Theatre* (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2005). On contemporary uses of the Indonesian Gamelan in the UK see Neil Sorrell, *A Guide to the Gamelan* (Faber and Faber, 1990). More recently there have been several major events to further consider Bow Gamelan Ensemble's work and its legacies; this includes *Great Noises That Fill the Air* (2018), a retrospective exhibition held at the Cooper Gallery, Dundee curated by Sophia Hao; and a three-day event involving film, performances, and installations with over eighty collaborators in response to Paul Burwell's practice titled *TAPS: Improvisations with Paul Burwell*, held at Dilston Grove and curated through Matt's Gallery, London (2010). Michael Shane Boyle's *The Art of Logistics* (Stanford University Press, 2024) uses Bow Gamelan Ensemble's work as a key example of artist re-use of tools developed for supply-chain capitalism.

6 Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (Verso, 2013), 2.

7 Ibid.

the political milieu from which it emerges and therefore ripe for reworking in relation to contemporary urgencies.

To gesture towards this otherwise articulation, I study the compilation of unexpected objects and compositional strategies in the archival documentation of Bow Gamelan, and I structure the chapter as a series of text experiments. These alternate between offering a critical analysis of the materials consulted and offering a creative writing practice. I also engage with the Stolen Voices archive at a point prior to the production of the album and performance scores. In doing so I argue for the potential poetics of a process that is coming into being. At times these experimental texts are announced or framed, and at times they appear as interventions wedged between paragraphs with a different tone. I try to unlearn what I know about how the Stolen Voices project unfolded by locating, scanning, leaving, then returning to notebooks from 2015 and 2016. I reread emails related to project management, project partners, funding applications, and evaluations. I look at photographs from rehearsal rooms, devising exercises, possible headings for performance written in felt tip pen on brightly colored paper. I return to materials sent to experimental composers containing prose and notes from city archives. I read theoretical and political and social texts that I handwrite notes on, scan, leave, then reread. The encounter I want to stage through these two registers aims to destabilize a finite account of what has happened. I opt for a gesture towards that which may still be. An indication of the latent otherwise potential contained in creative processes.

i. living in an unfinished world

Sonic detection within the context of Stolen Voices has described a form of attending to material and immaterial sonic relics and atmospheres found lingering in coastal towns and seaside resorts. To practice sonic detection is to attune, over time, to inter-affective states of living, to attachment, moments of solidarity, social and cultural practices, tones, tensions, emotional remnants, and residues. As I read *Site-Specific Performance* by

artist and performance studies scholar Mike Pearson I note how his reference to the changing postindustrial landscape of the UK implies that the site may no longer exist.⁸ Buildings and physical infrastructure are often no longer visibly present within the context of their original historical use and purpose. In accordance with policy developments they may appear changed or adapted to suit contemporary demand and economic needs. In articulations of *Stolen Voices*, Johanna and I have considered how oscillations between the contingent and the self-determinate operate in relation to how and by whom site is constructed and controlled.⁹ The work of the sonic detective is to figure out how findings, in their textual, sonic, or felt formats, can be wrested from their original articulations then rearticulated into aesthetic forms such as live performance, experimental electro-acoustic compositions, and scholarly or creative-critical writing. This acute and precise labor often requires the expertise of individuals or collectives, note-taking, and an ongoing practice of attention that is receptive to perturbations in the aural environment and beyond.

The sonic detective relies on knowledge found in archives, interviews, meeting minutes, documents of work, academic and non-academic literature, policy reports, art works, and accounts, however fragmentary, of lived experiences. Ultimately, what is sought by the sonic detective is akin to what I read in the work of Ernesto Laclau and Mouffe as the two necessary steps for rethinking the current political conjuncture. The first requires acceptance of the actual “transformations of the world in which we live.”¹⁰ They warn against making distortions or ignoring changes as this encourages “inhabiting forms of thought which repeat the old formulae.”¹¹ The second demands an active and “full insertion in the present—in its struggles, its challenges,

8 Mike Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

9 Rebecca Collins and Johanna Linsley, “Stolen Voices Is a Slowly Unfolding Eavesdrop on the East Coast of the UK,” *Arts* 8, no. 4 (2019): 1–18.

10 Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, “Post-Marxism without Apologies,” *New Left Review* 166 (1987): 80.

11 Ibid.

its dangers — to interrogate the past: to search within it for the genealogy of the present situation.”¹² This past interrogation aims to initiate dialogue rather than languor in nostalgia, so as to identify the “continuities and discontinuities, identifications and ruptures.”¹³ From here, within the process, it should be possible to consider scenarios for living otherwise.

ii. listening otherwise and sonic detection

A sonic detective actively listens for inconsistencies, ongoing complaints, tensions, tipping points, banalities, or anomalies, the disruption or eruption within a sequence or set. Sonic detection requires attention, a kind of aural attention receptive to what dings or dents, that is alive to impressions that don’t totally add up, or which add up all too neatly. Aural attention requires an ongoing practice of proximity to the ways we are together in the world.¹⁴ This includes proximity to the social, the economic, the institutional, the infrastructural, and the political setups that allow lives to unfold in certain forms and not others. Sonic detection is not interested in calcifying these felt, and at times ephemeral, findings into singular representations. Sonic detection is invested in feeling out the edges of common sense constructions that can surface in phrases like “that’s just the way things are around here” or “it is what it is.” Such phrases imply solidity and rigidity within the status quo. Sonic detection, through its proximity to forms of life as lived out on-the-ground, aims to loosen or at the very least queer the solidifying effects of common sense constructions. The work then, is to detect the kinds of commonsensical constructions we are already *in* and to find room within them for movement, distortion, malleability, and momentum. In this chapter I describe this work as a practice of listening otherwise. This is an ongoing,

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ See Rebecca Collins, “Experiments in Aural Attention: Listening Away & Lingering Longer,” *Journal for Artistic Research* 27 (2022).

slowly unfolding receptive mode of being that, I argue, can lead to alternative historical formulations, the disruption of chronologies, and openings that can loosen the seemingly established. It is through reorientation or rearticulation of commonsensical constructions that sonic detection operates, pointing to where there might be shifting tectonics already at work within the fabric of the everyday.

Sonic detection finds affiliation with aspects of “weak theory” outlined by queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.¹⁵ Further affiliations are found in the ethnographic work of Kathleen Stewart.¹⁶ Each scholar seeks forms of engagement to recognize the potential of thought and knowledge found in objects, and actions that lean towards potential and possibility over scrutiny or the closing down of inquiry. Sedgwick questions the reliability of knowledge and what it *does*, in a performative sense. She queries what the quest for knowledge might reveal. She considers how the pursuit of knowledge—its exposure and acquisition processes—influence and inform what is found out and its relationship to truth. Stewart highlights the role of “affective matter” indicating the potential of things to accrue.¹⁷ These things, over time, build the direction of a life through sensation and collective sensibilities. Stewart’s position is useful for noting how something comes into view as a practice of attention and attunement, where rhythm and tone feature. She describes how, for example, a certain reading of the state of Vermont can throw itself together, from a set of potentials, into “an assemblage of dis-continuous yet mapped elements.”¹⁸ Articulations can arise from text in tourism brochures, bottles of maple syrup on sale in local shops, and a news story about a social gathering. Stewart describes this as an event:

15 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Duke University Press, 2003), 122–51.

16 Kathleen Stewart, “Weak Theory in an Unfinished World,” *Journal of Folklore Research* 45, no. 1 (2008): 71–82.

17 *Ibid.*, 81.

18 *Ibid.*, 73.

It remains an event — a moment when something happens to produce the quality of being in a scene. In other words, it's a composition — a poesis — and one that literally can't be seen as a simple repository of systemic effects imposed on an innocent world but has to be traced through the generative modalities of impulses, daydreams, ways of relating, distractions, strategies, failures, encounters, and worldings of all kinds.¹⁹

Stewart emphasizes how the utility of theory comes not from judging the value of analytic objects but from thinking about potential modes of knowing: how objects and items can be considered resonant. This acknowledges how something already present can resonate further. Equally, the practice of sonic detection requires a mode of thinking which attends to the types of feelings and knowledge found in the banal, the weird, the uncanny and haptic, which might not fit into broader categorical structures and systems which require sharp definitions.

The articulation of sonic detection as a form of listening *otherwise* draws on recent literature from sound, performance, and Black studies. This includes articulations of “living into *otherwise possibilities*” found in the work of Ashon T. Crawley²⁰ and a recognition of listening as a critical and colonial practice in the work of Dylan Robinson.²¹ In *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*, Crawley considers the otherwise possibilities for living that exist as pluralities within the seemingly given, seemingly finite forms of living that are, on the surface, more evident or readily available, yet which are limited. It is in the infinite plurality of existence, detectable through sensuous registers, that multiple imaginative forms for living are offered up. A crucial aspect of Crawley's argument points to the “necessary disruption” of existing epistemological parameters, disciplinary

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ashon T. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (Fordham University Press, 2017), 2.

²¹ Dylan Robinson, *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies* (University of Minnesota Press, 2020).

constructions, and objective attempts towards resolution that curtail multiple possibilities for living.²² It is the current coordinates of our contemporary configuration, Crawley argues, that renders a situation in which “Black flesh cannot easily breathe”; he seeks to find the means to disrupt the institutionalization of knowledge founded on rationality and reason so that otherwise epistemological fields can be detected, sensed, and inhabited.²³ Crawley, to formulate his argument, makes reference to the ongoing existence of the “sonic event.”²⁴ This is described as being “illusory and provisional,” always in movement and ongoing, “open-ended,” and this, for him, is an example of otherwise possibilities as it describes an infinite force.²⁵ It is within the infinite otherwise that sensuality lies and this is, as Crawley states, “a means to disrupt the current configurations of power and inequity.”²⁶ The means for otherwise thinking, as Crawley argues, enables “the ongoingness of possibility, of things existing other than what is given, what is known, what is grasped.”²⁷ As Crawley states, it is through the performative practices associated with Blackpentecostal Breath that Blackness meets the world to disrupt categories, institutionalization, and the categorization of thought.

Robinson in *Hungry Listening* considers how we might write otherwise about listening. In the book he pinpoints issues with the structures of inclusion within music and performance, with the aim of challenging dominant settler colonial structures of classical music composition and presentation. Robinson clarifies how “settler colonial structures” can be recognized as ways of doing things that go unmarked, which provide “structures of certainty” and guide “normative and unmarked forms of listening privilege.”²⁸ By “settler,” Robinson clarifies, he is referring to

22 Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*, 7.

23 Ibid., 3.

24 Ibid., 2.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., 2–3.

27 Ibid., 24.

28 Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 10.

anyone who has come to stay in Indigenous lands: The examples he cites are based predominantly in Canada.²⁹ Robinson's main argument takes issue with unreflective Western listening practices that have conditioned—and limited—sensory engagement which he aptly describes with the phrase “tin ears.”³⁰ The reference to “tin ears” calls for greater recognition of the “settler colonial forms of perception” to which Robinson argues we have become accustomed.³¹ Robinson's specific use of the phrase arises in relation to *Delgamuukw v. the Queen*, a land claim trial in northern British Columbia, Canada. As part of the trial lawyer Peter Grant requested that Chief Mary Johnson sing a *limx oo'y*. This was, in part, a song to mourn ancestors yet, more significantly, was intended as part of the claim. Songs constitute evidence in Indigenous law proceedings and convey embodied feelings of history to emplace the listener within a sensorial orientation of place. However, during the trial, Justice McEachern refused to listen to the song on the grounds of having a “tin ear.” This example, for Robinson, evidences how a Westernized listening positionality refutes music and song as legitimate forms for evidencing legal claims. This is of relevance to sonic detection, as is Robinson's description of hungry listening, which states:

Hungry listening prioritizes the capture and certainty of information over the affective feel, timbre, touch and texture of sound. Attending to affect alongside normative listening habits and biases allows us to imagine (or audiate) otherwise—to develop strategies for different transformative politics of listening that are resurgent in their exploration of Indigenous epistemologies, foundations, languages, and sensory logics; or, ones that are decolonial in their ability to move us beyond settler listening fixations.³²

²⁹ Ibid., 269.

³⁰ Ibid., 45.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 38.

A decolonial approach to listening requires us, as listeners, to relinquish certainty, to linger in the unknown, and to listen deeply enough to touch. It requires the adoption of an approach that is ready to confess that we are not sure what listening even is. Robinson, in making a case for “critical listening positionality,” calls for greater awareness of how “normative listening orientations [operate] across a range of gendered and racial formations” with a drive to “listen otherwise” as a means to “orchestrate such stratified positional listening toward intersectional antiracist, decolonial, queer, and feminist listening practices.”³³

Stolen Voices and the practice of sonic detection has been developed and predominantly practiced by two queer white women in their early forties within the United Kingdom. The ambition for this work is for it to be considered as a radically collaborative queer critical spatial practice. In this sense, sonic detection describes a practice affiliated with the imaginative social thinkers of the nineteenth century, who are described by political theorists Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle as being tasked with broaching the “hiatus between individual anxieties and collective transformations.”³⁴ Toscano and Kinkle draw heavily on the work of sociologist Charles Wright Mills. In doing so, they articulate how the social fabric contains within it the complexities of biography and history which, as they intersect, make the identification of a coherent social map that might assist in locating and sharing a sense of the collective struggles and their broader dynamics, very difficult to find and to articulate. In this sense, the identification of “possible levers of change vanishes into the background.”³⁵ The practice of sonic detection actively seeks such levers of change through encounters of various kinds, such as workshops, performances, dialogue, archival documents. This is achieved by bringing artists, activists, scholars, and community members together to partake in on-the-

33 Ibid., 60.

34 Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute* (Zero Books, 2015), 14.

35 Ibid., 85.

ground situated research. These encounters provide opportunities to collectively listen out for, and hear, the possible multiple perspectives and ideologies that compete at each site studied.

A main observation I make, as a consequence of the Stolen Voices investigation, is the ongoing influence and impact of Margaret Thatcher's policies on areas of renewal in postindustrial UK towns. We felt this particularly acutely in our work in Seaham, County Durham in the Northeast of the UK. This part of County Durham had formerly been the site of coal mining activities and a Labour stronghold up until 2021. The effects of Thatcherism are very long reaching. They have fundamentally shaped the composition of the UK and, arguably, continue to condition behaviors and attitudes arising in the most basic everyday interactions. I turn to literature published thirty-five years earlier as a means to engage with the root of these issues. I pick up a copy of political theorist Stuart Hall's book *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*. I'm interested in how he describes Thatcherism as being "about the remaking of common sense: its aim is to become the 'common sense' of the age. 'Common sense' shapes our ordinary, practical, everyday calculation and appears as natural as the air we breathe."³⁶ Hall's use of the term "common sense" is derived from his reading of Antonio Gramsci and is most explicitly laid out in his article "The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without Guarantees."³⁷ In the article Hall questions how historical situations "organize human masses" and, by referring to Gramsci, he uncovers the formulation of ideological terrains.³⁸ These, according to Gramsci, have to be mapped out in real terms, shifting ideology from the realm of abstraction into concrete instances which deposit "traces."³⁹ These traces consist of "stratified deposits in popular

36 Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (Verso, 1990), 8.

37 Stuart Hall, "The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without Guarantees," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (1986): 28–44.

38 Ibid., 28.

39 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (International Publishers, 1971), 324.

philosophy” which no longer have an inventory yet establish and define the fields along which ideological struggle is likely to move.⁴⁰ For Gramsci, this terrain is common sense and it is composed of necessarily “fragmentary, disjointed and episodic” elements.⁴¹ Common sense becomes that which is taken for granted, a kind of “folklore of the future.”⁴² A set of moveable beliefs, philosophical positions, and ideas that circulate within everyday life. The composition of common sense for sonic detection, as I discussed earlier in the chapter, is considered a malleable, albeit ephemeral, substance. It presents an opportunity for reorientation or rearticulation that can be attained by a practice of listening otherwise.

I read how Hall tracks the means by which Thatcherism, through its articulation of “the good life” as “value for money” was able to harness and profoundly shape, via populism, the classes of contemporary British Society.⁴³ This formulation of “the popular” cut across class divides, thereby making use of popular discontents.⁴⁴ As part of this, and in line with cultural theorist Raymond Williams, I note how Hall specifically articulates that it is the “certain ways of thinking, feeling, and calculating characteristic of Thatcherism [that] have entered as a material and ideological force into the daily lives of ordinary people.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, and of relevance for the work of Stolen Voices, he states how, “Thatcherism has literally stolen the slogans of national self-determination and antifascism out of our mouths.”⁴⁶ Stolen Voices aims to counter this by putting feeling back into flesh to stem political disaffection and, through an embodied practice of sonic detection, make more evident the necessarily fragmentary and disjointed infrastructure of com-

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 362n5.

⁴³ Hall, *Hard Road to Renewal*, 4.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 2.

mon sense so as to motivate and give momentum and airtime to common affects in defense of social justice and equality.⁴⁷

Now it really is time to summon some joy.

iii. a summoning

I find a film trailer for *Full Moon Resurrection*, a forthcoming documentary on Paul Burwell produced by Hull-based video production company Nova Studios, supported by Future's Venture Fund. I distill the actions and the speech of Anne Bean who appears in the clip. My intention is to experiment with a creative-writing practice that operates as a form of listening otherwise. I do this as a rehearsal, preparing myself to reenter the Stolen Voices archive. The section described comes after the

47 At the time of writing the UK was in the midst of a strike by over 50,000 railway workers in a trade union dispute over jobs, pay, and working conditions. Mick Lynch, general secretary of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT), gained traction on media platforms for pointing out the “nonsense” interviewing techniques used in contemporary journalism. One example sees Lynch repeatedly pointing to a calm group of people to gently explain to an interviewer what a picket is. The interviewer, Kay Burley, continues to ask what will happen should employees brought in on short term contracts cross the picket line. Lynch gently insists that they will be asked not to work and not to cross the picket. In another example, perhaps of more relevance here, Lynch uses the term “level up” to describe what is needed for employees of network rail and transport systems to make their working contracts viable in the face of rising costs of living and in relation to pension cuts. The term “leveling up” refers to a conservative party policy manifesto issued in 2019 ahead of the general election. This aimed to address inequality issues within certain regions of the UK which suffer from poor infrastructure and a lack of cultural engagement, for example the Northeast. Lynch's use of the term offers an interesting example of stealing words as a means to critique the actions of the conservative party. To date the use of “leveling up” has mainly served as empty rhetoric to keep voters in the Northeast happy without delivering or improving conditions for living or employment prospects for those living the furthest from Westminster. Katie Strick, “How RMT Boss Mick Lynch Became the Star of the Rail Strikes — And All His Top Moments,” *The Standard*, June 26, 2022, <https://www.standard.co.uk/insider/rmt-boss-mick-lynch-rail-strikes-kay-burley-piers-morgan-b1007619.html>.

opening three minutes of live percussion, pyrotechnics, and film documentation of Burwell playing the drums in an abandoned swimming pool.⁴⁸

Her
hand
extends arm's length
light grip
on
metal frame
of
small chandelier
diamond-shapes chinkjangle
shakes arm
up
then
down
now
bending
horizon
line
walks towards
broken brick shards
underfoot
audible
warm, bright, orange
firework
interrupt
illuminate
quietly
growing beside
written
bold

⁴⁸ Future's Venture, "Paul Burwell Full-Moon Resurrection 01/10/20," *YouTube*, November 23, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FF7Rr2qPrCU>.

from fold
let consonants meet
ever evolving vowels
small chandelier
balance repeat
orange glow now,
she speaks

"I always think that Paul (Burwell) didn't have a chronology. In the way of things happening one after another. He felt he could remember the future, as much as he could remember the past. And this came from his kitchen."

hand reaches
touches
small chandelier

"I found it forlornly lying there when I came in 2017 on the derelict floor where we spent so many wonderful years."

hand moves
covers heart
she says

"I think memories become like stones."

hand clasps
notebook
curls into
almost a fist

"They get too dense and you just keep remembering the memory instead of the river."

torchlight
turns
onto

notebook
contains
particular
page
she reads

“I would still like to sing about love.
A song about love.
A song that would let you into the secrets of the people I
know.”

head shake
from side-to-side
chinkjangle sound returns

“And of their lives
And the way they hold their heads.
The way they work their great courage.
And their triumphs.
Their moments of sadness and their bitterness.
I am happy these people are active during my lifetime.
That I have passed through their realities to some extent.”

head shake again

“I would have liked them for my sisters or brothers.”

head shake
camera focus
falls to face
chinkjangle
comes to rest on cheek
gracefully grazes
duct for tears

iv. desolation & abandonment

I search for documents and archival evidence on the work of Bow Gamelan. The first thing I find is a poster for their performance at the National Review of Live Art, October 8–12, 1986 at the Albert Hall Institute. The printed advertisement contains a slogan which reads “scrap metal music to melt your prejudices” and I interpret these words as politically motivated and, at the same time, aimed at disbanding disciplinary preconceptions.⁴⁹

Bow Gamelan constructed their own instruments from bits of scrap metal, glass shards, abandoned mechanical devices, early warning systems, horns, boilers, oil drums, sirens, motors, explosive and flammable substances (e.g. paraffin, propane, helium, hydrogen), high-pressure steam whistles, low-pressure steam whistles, compressed air, high-pressure water jets, high-power wind, lightning machines, industrial cranes, sunken boats, rusted barges, fire, tidal energies, and sonorous pyrotechnics. The trio initially began working together by making an installation for *A Noise in your Eye!*, an *International Exhibition of Sound Sculpture* held at the Arnolfini, Bristol. At the University of Bristol Theatre Archive I encounter an interview where Burwell describes this work to David Briers.⁵⁰ The event is also described in an issue of *Performance Magazine* as the first overview of sound sculpture and an assemblage of works typically overlooked or marginalized.⁵¹ To provide some context, other artists in the exhibition included Alvin Lucier and Max Eastley. The exhibition went on to tour to Manchester, Hull, Huddersfield, Sheffield, and the Barbican. The first Bow Gamelan performance took place at the London Musicians Col-

49 Bow Gamelan Ensemble Archive, “Posters, image 12,” <http://bowgamelan.com/archive-posters.html#images-12>.

50 David Briers, “The Bow Gamelan Ensemble,” *The Arnolfini Interview. Arnolfini Preview*, May 9, 1986, 13. RLAP/B/109 Record of Live Art Practice Collection, University of Bristol Theatre Collection.

51 Ken Gray, “A Noise in Your Eye,” *Performance Magazine* August–September 1985, 14–15, <https://performancemagazine.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Performance-Magazine-36-Aug-Sept-1985.pdf>.

lective on October 20, 1983 for an event, held at their premises at 42 Gloucester Avenue, titled *Self-Made Musical Instruments*. This was intended to be a one-off show yet led to their subsequent formation as a group and, due to demand — and health and safety regulations — to their progression into large-scale open-air events. The piece, described as a durational “sculptural situation,” consisted of a number of newly fabricated musical constructions, and was proposed in answer to a document titled “New Musical Instruments?” Burwell, who had been experimenting with self-made instruments since the seventies, invited performance artist Anne Bean and sculptor Richard Wilson to take part.⁵² The musical assemblages were subsequently described, by Wilson, as having “no history” and as being “really quite radical things.”⁵³

Bow Gamelan conducted the majority of their explorations along Bow Creek on an old working barge part-owned by Wilson. The trio visited former boatyards, timber yards, and the last remaining paint factories — which, at the time, continued to emit high-pressure steam from valves — to gather scrap materials, discarded cultural detritus, metal objects, and broken or abandoned machinery. Burwell describes this phase and activity as a means for building up “a body of common experience.”⁵⁴ An exploratory process subsequently took place, often at the site chosen for the performance. This process included the application of forces, such as heat or tides, to found items, or exposure to the elements, such as wind. The physical relationships and reactions derived from the changing state of materials, and their sonorous potential, were sought and explored. Burwell describes how they “all shared a sense of excitement and beauty of the sounds — machinery, welding, steam, boats.” They “had the idea of sound production” and therefore “naturally our imaginations attempted to convert all of the junk of Bow Creek, and anything

52 Joelson, *Library of Light*, 161.

53 Ibid.

54 Paul Burwell, “Whirled Burning Wire Wool Spark Wheels,” *Theatrephile* 2, no. 5 (1984/1985): 54–55. RLAP/B/109 Record of Live Art Practice Collection, University of Bristol Theatre Collection.

else that fell into our paths, into instruments and sounds.”⁵⁵ The site itself, along the Thames, was also described by Burwell as containing an “atmosphere of desolation and abandonment, the kind that has always appealed to the poetic imagination.”⁵⁶

What I’m trying to perform in this text is an exercise of time continuum sewn into the fabric of otherwise ephemeral histories to reap uncertainty benefit found in the power of data repositories. Call it strings to a bow in the face of crimes against humanities. Turn your back to the rhythm of the narrative engineers. Leap with circular bell blades in an uncertain song to as yet unknown words. The extended flute pipe once removed forces one to forget words to yell. Make a connection not there. Try to keep moving even when tired. Urge on the rhythm of the institution you are in or the institution in you. Try to suspend the flute pipe on your shoulders then leap. Tattoo the word soul in capitals on your elbow. After all, it is out on a limb.

v. communities, collaborations & sonic inflected sites

I want to write about the community contexts within which the work of *Stolen Voices* took place. I’m keen to articulate something about the professional coffees, emails, dialogues, and encounters with cultural and arts-based infrastructures existing within the Northeast. Each time I try to write I collapse the dynamics into a kind of banal sequence of events or list of accomplishments that fails to account for the nuances and energies uncovered at the time of making the work. I opt instead to reenter the work from another angle, an attempt to lyrically evoke what might have happened.

Attention is life
Tuck admin sit snug
Friction filaments hang in sentences
Where mitigation is a box marked x

⁵⁵ Ibid., 55.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Pause or swerve
As certainty careens
Assemblage hides in studio screens

Council fuel will not fulfill
Task request yet done
Meet to discuss in pre-project pro-rejection room

Legacy is a life beyond liaison

Pause or swerve
As certainty careens
Assemblage hides in a ripped seam

Irrational spin on lessons learnt
Pivot choir / singers with caution
Insert olives for easy break up
Qual meets quant in iffy boardroom

Pause or swerve
As certainty careens
Assemblage hides in HQ dreams

Nonsense may save
A situation rendered inane
Meet Tommy for a time
Burnt / ruins of building
Indicate why

The project gains momentum as it travels up the east coast of the UK.

In 2015, I relocate from Aberystwyth on the coast of Wales to County Durham on the northeast coast of England. I use the project to open dialogues with local arts organizations. I learn to pitch the most salient aspects in under three minutes to secure the crucial percentage of match funding from potential cultural partners. In *Stolen Voices*: Seaham, and subsequent iterations

as we move along the coast, it is important to build on existing infrastructure. We invite local musicians David Curtis, Robert McBlane, and Ani Sandwith to perform at the gig night we organize at local café Roobarb 'n Custard. For the eavesdropping workshop with local artists from East Durham Artists' Network (EDAN) I make use of local contacts for the catering as a ham broth gets served, courtesy of Tonya's Café.

In the archival documentation of Bow Gamelan, I find evidence of how their projects intersect with local communities and artists living and working along the Thames. I also find evidence for how their explorations evidenced and exposed the structures and systems of the items reworked. Indeed, Bow Gamelan received commissions and invitations to perform at live art and music festivals, galleries, artist-run collectives, and art schools across the UK, and toured their work internationally. For *Offshore Rig* produced by Arts Admin, supported by the Watermans Arts Centre in Brentford and performed for the LIFT Festival, the trio lived and worked on Lots Ait, an island and former dry dock on the river.⁵⁷ Discarded machinery, filing cabinets, abandoned hoovers, and a giant glass wind chime formed components of the gamelan. All items used in the show were found and developed on the island. The piece made use of the old boatyard and three enormous sheds with audience members seated some fifty yards away on bleachers. Communities, businesses, and individuals such as The Thames Steam Launch Company, Eel Pie Marine, and Triveni Kathak Dance Troupe were incorporated into the performance.

Over their seven years working together Bow Gamelan collaborated with a number of artists. These included the late British sound, visual, and concrete poet Bob Cobbing (1920–2002) and American poet and percussionist sound artist Z'EV (1951–2017). *The Navigators*, a piece made in collaboration with Z'EV, was performed at the Watermans Arts Centre in Brentford over a period of six weeks in July 1989 alongside Piers and Titus Bur-

57 Bow Gamelan, *Offshore Rig*, LIFT Festival of Performance, Watermans Arts Centre, Brentford, 1987.

well.⁵⁸ According to the score in the special collection held at Chelsea Collections and Archives, the piece began with a “ket worth steam boiler overture” followed by pyrotechnics, a duet between a high pressure steam boiler and a compressed air horn. The ket worth boiler refers to a patented form of steam boiler, designed circa 1852 in the US. In the documents I read, Burwell often refers to how his knowledge of technology related most closely to this era. The piece involved caskophones, twelve-volt sirens, hand-cranked sirens, marimbas, and floating oil drums. Towards the end of the piece remote control helicopters flew in with pyrotechnic whistles and compressed air horns. Firecrackers and maroons led to a din finish with a wire wool finale. On the Bow Gamelan website, the piece is described as a “Port of Calls” occurring along the Thames at Waterloo Bridge, Richmond Bridge, and Kew Bridge.⁵⁹ A crane attached to a barge, dug out at Pudding Mill River, served as the platform for performances and as their living space. For $51^{\circ}29.9' N$, $0^{\circ}11' E$, a documentary filmed for *Alter Image*, Channel 4, Bow Gamelan performed *Concrete Barges* near Rainham on the Thames exploring the resonant properties of high and low tide in relation to empty, semi-submerged boats.⁶⁰ Sticks and beaters made audible the influence of incoming water on the sound of the barges, evidencing interactions over time between tidal energy and sound. Foghorns, hooters, and sirens form companions to the evolving sonically inflected action. Acoustic interactions from passing ships further contributed to the piece.

Within the exploratory devising processes of Bow Gamelan, I read a desire for making *otherwise* assemblages. By bringing together discarded detritus, the majority with sonorous properties, the prospect of listening otherwise becomes more sali-

58 William Cobbing and Rosie Cooper, *Booooook: The Life and Work of Bob Cobbing* (Occasional Papers, 2015), and Ellen Zweig, dir., *Heart Beat Ear Drum*, 2012.

59 Bow Gamelan Ensemble, *The Navigators*, <http://bowgamelan.com/bge-the-navigators-1989.html>.

60 Bow Gamelan Ensemble, $51^{\circ}29.9' N$, $0^{\circ}11' E$, *Alter Image/Channel 4*, 1987, <https://vimeo.com/484866531>.

ent. Assemblages are not rearranged for use-value but for their sonorous and energetic properties. It is through this practice that Bow Gamelan subsequently share their alternative tactics for making and doing with an audience. I return to read my copy of *Site-Specific Performance* where Pearson asks, "How can performance illuminate, explicate, and problematize the multiplicity of attachments, meanings, and emotions that resonate within and from landscapes: visual, aural and tactile?"⁶¹ Furthermore, he questions how site-based practices can "discern the constraints and possibilities of a given situation."⁶² I begin to realize that this is where site-specific performance practice meets the deeper political questions I outlined in the introduction. In the case of Bow Gamelan, this manifests itself in a practice intensely embedded in the present with the detritus of the era which, at the same time, asks how to get beyond given forms by questioning and experimenting with the specific purpose and productivity of found objects.

vi. tinkering with structures & systems

In the archival documents held on Bow Gamelan and Paul Burwell at the special collection in Chelsea, the University of Bristol *Theatre Collection*, and on their website, I find evidence of an ongoing search for discarded items arranged in unusual and unexpected combinations. I encounter brightly colored drawings indicating fantastical couplings and spectacular realizations. There is a fervent search for wondrous effects and an avid engagement with otherwise systems, structures, and forces. This informs the outward manifestations of and, to some extent, the planning for their deployment in front of a live audience. The constructed Bow Gamelan instruments conformed to three main types: the rhythmic and the percussive (fans, oil drums, electric motors, splintering glass); the melodic (bells, steam whistles, sirens, electric horns); and pyrophones and pyrotech-

⁶¹ Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance*, 188.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 189.

tics (wax tapers, electric arc welders, blow torches). The latter operate both as instruments in their own right and as a means to activate other instruments. Each instrument underwent a number of alterations with elements added, or removed, thereby enabling each to evolve without the need to remain faithful to its original composition. Non-amplification was key to the work of Bow Gamelan, as noted by both Julian Cowley and Paul Burwell.⁶³ The emphasis was on exploratory processes in the form of taking apart and tinkering with the systems and structures encountered in items excavated. This served to rechannel energies and forces found into alternative combinations.

At the special collections and archives in Chelsea I find a typed document titled “The Bow Gamelan Ensemble, Glasgow 1986.” Beneath the title are several words written in capital letters, underlined, and highlighted in orange. They include “PYROPHONES,” “WHISTLING WORMS,” “MOUTH BALLOONS,” and “SNAPPITS” (fig. 5.1). These words, due to the number of times they appear in the documentation, could be described as a Bow Gamelan vocabulary. They relate to the self-made instruments that commonly feature in their performances. Bow Gamelan produced detailed drawings and scores to indicate the combination of invented instruments, kinetic sculptures, and sonorous pyrotechnics to be deployed in their performances as well as the intended direction of travel for the items after the application of forces such as wind or heat.

One of the drawings I find on the Bow Gamelan website appears to evidence the intended action for mouth balloons. The image depicts a number of balloons contained within a dome-like shape. A text at the top reads: “Helium balloons with air balloons [...] the air balloons have whistles that are blown as the air escapes and so one gets a disappearing whistling as they float upwards.”⁶⁴ Floating and air-borne objects are given sonorous

63 Julian Cowley, “Bow Gamelan Ensemble — Great Noises That Fill The Air,” *Random Spectacular 2* (2014).

64 *Bow Gamelan Ensemble Archive*, “Drawings and Scores, image 11,” <http://bowgamelan.com/archive-drawings-scores.html#images-11>.

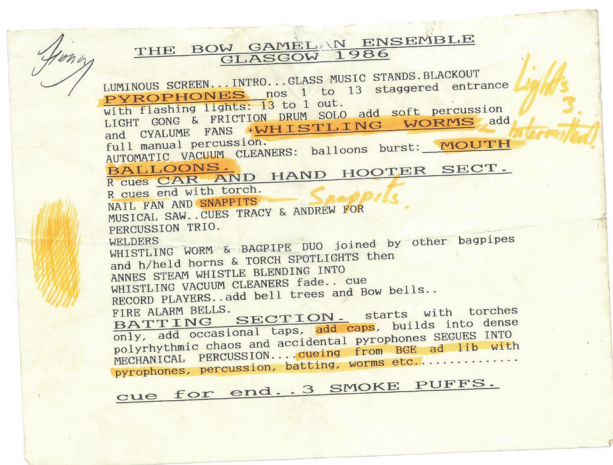


Fig. 5.1. The Bow Gamelan Ensemble, Glasgow 1986. Image courtesy of The Paul Burwell Estate, Special Collections and Archives, Chelsea. All rights reserved.

percussive adjustments to render their vertical trajectory and exit audible. This illustrates the volume and depth of the space adding a compositional element to an otherwise barely perceptible item indicating a direction of travel otherwise unavailable. Another construction, the “gobbler,” primarily consists of an empty oil drum with an electric motor inside and a string with tin cans attached. The motor winds up the string then releases, as though it were “a giant demented Kenwood Chefette.”⁶⁵ Pyrotechnics shower the instrument with colors. A flare provides illumination. Marimbas, typically constructed of wooden bars, were made using two water tanks with leaf springs, commonly used on heavy commercial vehicles or railway carriages in the 1970s, and were played by hand as colored smoke emerged.

65 Bow Gamelan Ensemble Archive, “Drawings and Scores, image 3,” <http://bowgamelan.com/archive-drawings-scores.html#images-3>.

Catherine Wheels were cited as optional. Bathtub castanets, fitted with distress flares, were incorporated to illuminate.

The scores, developed to indicate the possible organization and order of events, are described by Burwell as “a Surrealist shopping list.” In an interview with David Briers for *The Arnolfini Interview*, Burwell states how scoring was akin to a form of choreographing, used to sketch out the dynamics and contrasts in the work.⁶⁶ Bean, who also features in the Briers interview, indicates how this served to intertwine the aural and visual elements of each piece. The trio were not beholden to the outlines in the scores. The unpredictability of the waste materials in use in the performances, and, more often than not, the weather conditions, all informed the work, as did its delivery in front of a live audience. Indeed, there are a number of anecdotes in the archive from Burwell and Bean about performing the work in front of audiences in Germany and in the UK where the weather was unpredictable.⁶⁷ The combustion of Wilson’s score at the start of one of their shows and the regular arrival of the fire brigade also feature. Rose De Wend Fenton and Lucy Neal narrate how Bow Gamelan’s opening piece for LIFT 93 led to the arrival of the Fire Brigade. Their narration includes a conversation they had with sculptor and former Bow Gamelan member Richard Wilson. He underscores the necessity to make it clear to the emergency services that the use of flames and smoke “are theatrical effects” and “are less dangerous than they look,” adding a parting caveat to include saying “that you’re theater people. It’s your job to create illusions.”⁶⁸

The archive represents the deep dive some of us have been longing for. A change of pace, pitch shift, oh to be indoors, oh some silence, oh to rest my ears on documents, a consented period of concentration, oh to have someone hand you something, read aloud handwriting from the sixteenth century and say “this might be of use to your sonic detection.” To answer

66 Briers, “The Bow Gamelan Ensemble,” 13.

67 Ibid.

68 Fenton and Neal, *The Turning World*, 31.

emails, to offer a list to your lists, to hold you indoors in a phone locked in a box no water only pencils scenario with side opening acetate-free boxes with string ties at the side. You are here to be presented with an order not of your own making, to believe and read an order in the documents you are given. To believe the archivist is also in on it after all they are dramaturgically plotting how your morning, afternoon, morning after and following afternoon visit might go troubling themselves to think whether what you read next is suitable on a full stomach and taking care not to give you too much right when you are caffeine starved bcoz that is right when it lands. shh!

A reference to the actual phrase “eavesdrop”:

Petition of James Davidson to the magistrates of Aberdeen June 2nd 1797, the stocking manufacturer building has extended a side wall to within 18 inches of the neighboring thread manufacturers building, there is no way to clean the building, a request is made for the building to be pulled down.⁶⁹

An addition to our sonic sub-collection served by C., an archivist at the town house. A thread manufacturer gets irate as a stocking manufacturer has erected a building too close and the detritus from the eaves (actual eaves’ droppings) cannot be retrieved and so pile up indefinitely.

This is the stuff a sonic detective’s dreams are made of and it gives rise to a round of “whats.”

What

is a sonic event?

What

69 Prior titles. June 2, 1797. CA/13/NSIT/5/178 Aberdeen New Street Trustees: Prior titles or south side of Flour Mill Brae: vendor is James Davidson, merchant to William Kennedy. Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Archives, Aberdeen.

- What kinds of events are represented sonically?
- What is the relationship between details, anecdotes, rumors, overheard conversations and other contingent experiences, and broader systems or structure?
- What are we listening for? Hoping to find?
- What if every environment has an aural architecture?
- What if master plans had acoustic properties?
- What might the process of hearing have to do with a sonic event already resounding?

I use these prompts, as I resurface from attending to the lists and scores within the documentation of the Bow Gamelan Ensemble archive, as an excuse to return to *Stolen Voices*. In particular, I return to a moment in Aberdeen when the use of a list took on specific relevance.

The refusal of an establishment to install a women's toilet
 A list of venues and bars from Stewart Home's novel *69 Things to Do with a Dead Princess*
 More men than women
 A tour of Aberdeenshire with a dead princess corpse
 Oh dear Diana
 Oh dear Dudley
 Oh Alan, Alan, Alan
 A pornographic romp
 Feasibility meets veracity of conspiracy
 White chocolate and raspberry flavor scones are rarer than you think, she will say on repeat throughout this episode

The name Alan is not that popular and we now know more than one Alan and don't you think that is a thing, she will say pointing to door bells, signs, passers-by

Bcoz when we aren't listening we are talking to each other, keeping up a running analysis, days and days, months, years-long, just a touch shy of a decade, full of revelation and little resolution

We spend hours outside, among strangers, attention heightened and stretched.

Returning to the Bow Gamelan archive at University of Bristol Theatre Collection I read an article written by Burwell where he describes how:

When things break or are discarded, they cease to be tied to their intended functions: a broken engine becomes an arrangement of shapes, masses, and materials that are very suggestive — they can act on the imagination and can lead it to possibilities of all kinds.⁷⁰

The act of uncoupling an item from its intended function or habitual assemblage and the conditions amidst which it might typically be encountered creates a dissociation. This opens the object, and its component parts up to *otherwise possibilities*. Within the emergent interdisciplinary subfield of critical discard studies I follow Josh Lapawsky and Max Liboiron, who ask, “[w]hat must be discarded for this or that system to be created and to carry on? To persist, systems must rid themselves of people, places, and things that actually or potentially threaten the continuity of those systems.”⁷¹ The waste from postindustrial objects and their assemblages appear in altered formations. They are made to sing a tune, one often distinct to their original

⁷⁰ Burwell, “Whirled Burning,” 54.

⁷¹ Max Liboiron and Josh Lapawsky, *Discard Studies: Wasting, Systems, and Power* (MIT Press, 2022), 3.

purpose. This points to the multivocality, or even polyvocality of the discarded.

Within Burwell's practice there is further evidence of explorations with the limitations of structures in *Paths into the Forest*, a booklet released by Mirliton, an independent publishing project set up by Burwell and David Toop, with support from Cobbing at the Writer's Forum. One of the texts in the pamphlet reads, "Nothing is separate, different elements could be combined into different pieces; interaction of individuals with any or all of these elements; not so much compositions, as means of acquiring new information; of finding different paths."⁷² I return to my copy of Crawley's book which reminds me, "Otherwise is a word that names plurality as its core operation, otherwise bespeaks the ongoingness of possibility, of things existing other than what is given, what is known, what is grasped."⁷³

Sonic topology morphology shudder the thought of a near future fiction found in sound in a connection of tiny movements welcome thanks for coming we need your help to find density felt in aural remains as is lingering heavy on the soundscape and on the tips of tongues rumors hold or the rumors have it lodged between the fiction friction facts that the unthinkable truth is stretched in the blurred archive of community chance game more through a yes no maybe come on come on come on to find the situation/problem stinging/ clinging to the roof of multiple mouths pitch gossip birds as new folk song starter bubble/brew at leisure be honest about regeneration as bad wallpaper over woodchip bcoz really how far can you stretch the vacuum of the unknown? In the beep-beep-beep gesture exercise think J or Jean or Jac the gossip and the paranoid unhinging about ghosts. Try duck-duckgo with "gray lady rant" "overflow morgue" or "smell of

72 Paul Burwell, *Paths into the Forest: Compositions/Musical Events* (Mirliton Publications, 1973), 2.

73 Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*, 24.

blood in Seaham Hall” get the knowledge outside of knowledge FYI get near but don’t fall through.

Bean, Burwell, and Wilson manipulated the assembled objects, and invented percussion instruments, each kitted out in a uniform consisting of sou’westers and oilskin bib and brace overalls, driven by a desire to be “anonymous and synonymous.”⁷⁴ In this sense they each cast themselves as operators, or technicians, working individually yet in unison. Their individual and collective task was to maintain momentum and movement within the assembled orchestra. I am keen to read this in relation to what Mouffe has argued as the necessary project for the left, which is to recognize how the “multiple struggles for emancipation are founded on the plurality of social agents and their struggles.”⁷⁵ Bow Gamelan Ensemble, via interactions with objects and assemblages made from discarded items no longer of use to the landscape of the postindustrial UK, evidence the multiple ongoing struggles of people, places, and things. There is no reconciliation in the work and this is a relief as agonisms and antagonisms are rendered evident to audiences through their live encounters with equipment (that was once useful), with the accidental, with the incidental, with the pyrotechnic, and with the forces and feelings circulating at live events. In this sense I read the performance work of Bow Gamelan as the staging of collective will. The construction of a “people” tasked with keeping the moving parts of, in this case, an actual physical assemblage up together with the recognition that not all circuits run the same course. There might be outages, eruptions, scraps, surplus, and dissonant effects.

I find a video recording of Burwell giving a lecture at the National Review of Live Art held in Glasgow in 1990. He describes how compositional systems are ways of getting beyond your own imagination.⁷⁶ As I listen to Burwell in the Live Art

74 Anne Bean, cited in Cowley, “Great Noises,” 5.

75 Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism* (Verso, 2019), 3.

76 Paul Burwell, National Review of Live Art, 1990. NRLA/1990/AV/10/1b and NRLA/1990/AV/11/1b, National Review of Live Art Collection, University of

archive room at the University of Bristol Theatre Collection, I'm keen to link Bow Gamelan's use of materials and their compositional practice to structures and relationships occurring within society. I rewatch the DVD *TAPS: Improvisations with Paul Burwell*, created to document an event of the same name in 2010. The event combined film, installation, and performance. On the second DVD included in the package is *PAST, a Dialogue*, a conversation between Anne Bean and Paul Burwell's notebooks. I learn how in 1976 Burwell authored a paper on collectivism. He called for a "democratic collective" in the environmental media department at the Royal College of Art.⁷⁷ I add this to a crucial clue I find in an interview with Sylvia Hallet, conducted and published before the formation of Bow Gamelan, when Burwell had already begun collaborating with Bean. In the text Burwell states:

In relation to "the society" [...] (by which one can mean everything from education to cultural artifacts, to political ways of so-called ordering the lives of people) the structures that are used for these are primarily a result of various sorts of conditioning; and the effects of these structures and what they actually represent or do, isn't given a lot of thought. So, by approaching almost any medium of communication in a liberated way, and creating different ways of structuring, you are in fact indicating models of different ways of thinking, or just indicating the possibility of other ways of doing things.⁷⁸

That which has served its original purpose, rather than be discarded or seemingly made to disappear, can reappear, or resound through recomposition. The act of reviving, repurposing, and recomposing such elements for otherwise intentions or

Bristol Theatre Collection.

77 Anne Bean with Chris Bishop, *TAPS: Improvisations with Paul Burwell* (Matt's Gallery, 2010)

78 Sylvia Hallet, "Paul Burwell's Music and Performance Anne Bean," *Undercut*, August, 1981, RLAP/B/109 Record of Live Art Practice Collection, University of Bristol Theatre Collection.



Fig. 5.2. Acts of combustion to defy the stasis of the archive. Image courtesy of The Paul Burwell Estate, Special Collections and Archives, Chelsea. All rights reserved.

possibilities that are not foreclosed is powerful and enigmatic as a political project.

vii. momentum in malleable material

The majority of the performance scores held in the special collections at Chelsea are crumpled, torn, repatched with electrical or gaffa tape. Most pages have a tinge of river mud to them, or the outline of a shoe print. All formulations constructed by Bow Gamelan were temporary, precarious, unpredictable, explosive, and ephemeral. The application of a flame to a bulb, often used in opening scenes, causes a dramatic burst within a short space of time. I find a list written on the back of a torn-off bit of cardboard lightbulb box. This leaves a lasting impression. It attests

to the lasting legacy of their work, namely an endless search and insertion into exploratory and experimental approaches to reorientate or rearticulate our sensical makeup. Reading and handling the physical items in the collection held at special collections and archives at Chelsea, I detect a desire to unhinge stasis even from within the archive itself (fig. 5.2).

The performance pieces, whilst they had a score, revolved around an ongoing curiosity for experimentation in a process of continual combustion. As Burwell expresses:

There is no point in making something lasting that may end tomorrow, but because we are not objects, our ideas are not objects and the relationships we make are not objects, but are all intangibles in a constant state of flux, are constantly undergoing an endless series of re-constructions, passing through an endless succession of different presents.⁷⁹

It is the unexpected and untethered connections that give spark to the recomposition of relations. There is reluctance to be beholden to set meanings and there is clear evidence in the work of Bow Gamelan for sustaining movement and momentum. In the archival documents I find Burwell regularly referring to movement. An ongoing desire to jump the fence. He often quotes Sun Ra, “I would tell the people on this planet that there are forces: their job is to slow you down: you are supposed to keep moving.”⁸⁰ In reading, watching, and thinking about Bow Gamelan’s treatment and manipulation of actual physical assemblages I feel hopeful that their legacy, in terms of performance composition and methodology, can offer a means for approaching immaterial assemblages. Indeed, in the case of *Stolen Voices* we set out to detect the remnants of relationships, to attune to that which, on the surface, might be less tangible and, through live performance, experimental music compositions,

79 “P.D. Burwell,” reprinted from *Park News*. RLAP/B/109/3 Record of Live Art Practice Collection, University of Bristol Theatre Collection.

80 Ibid.

and text-based scores treat their encounters with site — and its respective citizens — as malleable material for living and listening otherwise.

She asked you for a long leash, not one, not two, but three terms
 A politics in images is easier to get behind
 Suspend detail in small policy print
 Seize the means of history-making
 The sometime more
 The sometime less
 Unstable stable
 Issue with ordinary aspirations
 The necessary is not necessarily what you think it is as
 Unhinged crisis toils on
 Unperturbed and unaffected
 Find figure
 Find form
 Swap common sense
 Out nonsense
 For an *otherwise* configuration

As a parting gesture I leave a door ajar for future sonic detectives. I want to issue a signal to make evident that listening otherwise is a transferable practice and can be useful for making moveable that which appears rigid and fixed. To assist you in finding malleability and momentum to reorientate or rearticulate that which might be taken as common sense I can offer two essential resources. As you are reading these final lines, I lean over to whisper in your ear to gently say, I just wanted to let you know that, at the time of writing there are five A4-sized brown boxes due to be deposited at the University of Bristol Theatre Collection. In each box there are tourism pamphlets, photographs, props, and outfits from performances, text scores crumpled from their use in live performance, artworks from community members living along the east coast of the UK, field notes, diagrams, and maps. Online there is a data repository

with extracts of materials gathered throughout the duration of the investigation.⁸¹ As I've said before, there are no guarantees. I just hope, at the very least, if you make it there, you will find the momentum to keep going with these investigations.

⁸¹ Rebecca Collins and Johanna Linsley, "Stolen Voices," University of Edinburgh Data Share, 2022, <https://datashare.ed.ac.uk/handle/10283/4419>.

DISPATCHES

This final section of *Sonic Detection* is titled “Dispatches.” It arises from a technique we used across *Stolen Voices* to structure our collaborations with artists and other participants. We put together packages containing information, field notes, and artifacts we encountered in our investigations and sent them to the collaborator as “evidence” and prompts for further investigation. This form of exchange is modified here as a way to expand perspectives on sonic detection and to emphasize our sense of its polyphonic form. We decided to work with a third party, a kind of “agent,” artist and writer Naomi Pearce, who had been developing her own practice using techniques of in-depth interviewing to investigate death, desire, and memory, mainly focusing on gentrification and the role of women administrators in artist studios. By dedicating her attention to the unsaid and physiological nuances found in the cadence of speech she demonstrates an investigative commitment to uncovering what Roland Barthes has theorized as “the grain of the voice.”¹ We understood this attention to how something is said to be a kind of eavesdropping on the extralinguistic, a formula for uncovering feeling. Naomi had also spent some time with Sue Black, a

1 Roland Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962–1980*, trans. Linda Coverdale (Vintage Classic, 2010).

forensic anthropologist at the University of Dundee who had told her about a small bone in the ear called the *osseous labyrinth* (otic capsule or bony labyrinth). If this bone is cut open you can determine what someone's mother was eating the day they were born, and even the softness or hardness of the water she was drinking. Naomi understood the matter of the body as a giant recording device, an archive or storage unit for experience. Thanks to a grant from the Scottish Funding Council and Royal Society of Edinburgh we were able to hire Naomi as a research assistant for several months.

This opportunity to expand spoke to our long-term desire to collectivize our research methods. We had read about the potentials of "ensemble thinking" in an article by the After Performance Research Ensemble. The group, founded in 2015 at the National University of Singapore, is invested in a practice of "transauthorship" with a commitment to collective publishing to transmute "beyond the boundaried authorial self."² By sharing practices of reading, thinking, and writing across long tables and online documents, the group seeks to articulate how an "acquired mutual sensitivity to intellectual registers" can develop when one takes part in accompanied scholarly practices.³ This, we felt, was closely aligned to the sense of intellectual companionship that had been brewing between Rebecca and Johanna since our auspicious start on London's South Bank. We felt increasingly attached to formats and frameworks that foster collective thinking, reading, writing, and listening.

We turned over a list of expert witnesses to Naomi. Each name on the list referred to an artist, scholar, or activist whose work, we felt, brought new frameworks and experiences to our understanding of sonic detection, from the coast as border to the geology of coastal erosion, the socioeconomic dynamics underlying the British seaside tourism industry, and the embodied dimension of global shipping networks. The inter-

2 After Performance Working Group, "After Performance: On Transauthorship," *Performance Research* 21, no. 5 (2016): 36.

3 Ibid.

views include UK and Portugal based artist-activist and co-founder of Migrants in Culture Xavier de Sousa speaking to the intersections of migration, queerness, and the British government's hostile environment policy; Ghanaian photographer Nii Obodai discussing his work documenting the waterways of East Riding, Yorkshire; British economic geographer Christina Beatty on a series of studies addressing England's seaside towns; and Australian dance artist Amaara Raheem on her time in residence on the Hanjin, a container ship on a Pacific ocean route. At once associative, speculative and highly engaged with the concrete and material, these dispatches figure sonic detection as a method informed equally by imagination and attention to the conditions that produce us. We thus end the book by positioning sonic detection as the work of many voices and gesture to the ongoingness of the investigation.

Dispatches: A Report

by Naomi Pearce

This dispatch arrives from inland. I join the team when the possibility of listening to the coast is prohibited. West Kilbride, the closest shoreline, lies beyond the government-mandated five-mile radius from my home. The field therefore, is a bedroom in a tenement flat, a kitchen table, occasionally a sofa. Domestic location and seated position, receiving via short-range wireless technology and fiber optic cable, occasional interference from a hedge trimmer or a crying baby.

I almost don't take the case, strung out still from five long years investigating elsewhere (another story). But Rebecca has been an interlocutor of sorts for so long, she helped me develop the embodied approach I now call my forensic feminist methodology. You could say I owe her one. The email says they need someone like me, someone who wants to retrace the residue of past events to impress feelings and sensations onto the reader as an act of commemoration. I have the experience conducting intimate interviews, I am attuned to the sensorial echoes of sites, I've got a sustained commitment to the politics of place. Besides, I need the money.

I am given four names: Christina Beatty, Nii Obodai, Amaara Raheem, and Xavier de Sousa. A geographer, photographer, choreographer, and performer. Practitioners who deal in coastal information, they fabricate images, spreadsheets, and bodily

movements. Their modes of being, their tools may be different — seemingly at odds — but all share an investment in the changing dynamics of coastal sites. I’m asked to contact these expert witnesses, gather testimony, and report back.

The brief tells me their work articulates the coast as a border, leisure resort, and logistics hub, evidencing how environmental crisis, social injustice, and state neglect coalesce at these peripheral sites. I upskill by attuning my sensorial apparatus. I’ve got to make sure I can hear. I do a listening exercise by Pauline Oliveros, I channel sound artist Ain Bailey and wonder what kind of “temporary formation” my expert witnesses make? Bailey describes herself as always looking to “sonify something.”⁴ I think about the relationship between this and the latency at work in “Necessary Note.” What is it they sing?

And still and something unresolved.

I’m sent a blog post by geographer and sound artist AM Kanngieser in which they describe listening as “a coming to somewhere,” a practice “composed by and through difference.”⁵ When I contact my witnesses, they are scattered across the globe: Sheffield, Mozambique, Brighton, and the Black Range state park in rural Victoria, Australia. I come to them wanting to think through the listening process, to track the intersecting social, political, and economic influences affecting and influencing the feeling found in each of the coastal locations they have inhabited or worked within. I come with questions about methods. How do they know what they know about these sites? What tactics might a sonic detective borrow or avoid for future investigations?

In the courtroom, the expert witness provides testimony that is outside the experience and knowledge of a judge or jury. This

4 Ain Bailey, in Amal Khalaf and Alex Thorpe, hosts, “On Practice: Listening,” season 4, episode 2 of Serpentine Podcast, March, 5, 2021, <https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/art-and-ideas/on-practice-listening/>.

5 AM Kanngieser, “To Tend For, to Care With: Three Pieces on Listening as Method,” *The Seed Box*, September 11, 2020, <https://theseedbox.mistraprograms.org/blog/to-tend-for-to-care-with-three-pieces-on-listening-as-method/>.

is knowledge beyond the general and often provisional and, as law professor Fiona Raitt states, “much expert testimony goes to the core of scientific development, which is in a constant state of discovery and refinement. What we know today is sometimes very different from what we knew yesterday.”⁶

The following testimonies, presented here as processed conversations, echo this openness, this contingency. Before I turn over these transcripts to the wider Team for further investigation, here are some reasonable lines of inquiry...

I begin with Beatty, the economic geographer whose research into British seaside towns has directly influenced policy makers in the UK’s central government. Her reports, co-authored with Professor Steve Fothergill, are referenced by the Communities and Local Government Committee (CLG) as “filling the evidence gap that existed on seaside towns,” sites subject to dramatic economic growth fluctuations.⁷ Statistics on the Visit Britain website from 2013 suggest that since 2010 tourism has been the fastest growing sector in UK employment. At the time, projected growth forecasted the tourism industry will be worth over £257 billion by 2025.⁸ Seaside towns are poised to experience a surge in “staycations” as pandemic and Brexit travel restrictions limit overseas travel. Beatty describes herself as a statistician: She works with information gathered through questionnaires conducted by a data processing consultancy called the “Field Force,” an anonymous group who go door to door getting answers to questions which then become numbers on one of Beatty’s spreadsheets. I’m struck by how at odds this method is with the embodied eavesdropping, or sonic detection, practiced by Rebecca and Johanna.

6 Fiona Raitt, cited in Val McDermid, *Forensics: The Anatomy of Crime* (Profile Books, 2015), 271.

7 “REF Impact Case Study (3b): Seaside Towns,” Sheffield Hallam University, 2014, 3.

8 Visit Britain Media Team, “British Tourism — A Powerhouse for Job Creation,” *Visit Britain*, <https://www.visitbritain.com/jp/ja/media/british-tourism-powerhouse-job-creation>.

From Beatty I meet Obodai, a Ghanaian photographer on the ground in East Riding. Like the Field Force, he's listening to the stories locals want to tell. "You must walk and discover what is necessary," he says. Despite the optical nature of Obodai's medium, his methods rely on a more holistic sensory attunement. Deceleration, waiting. As he moves through East Riding in Yorkshire, the fastest eroding coastline in Europe — disappearing at an average rate of four meters per year since 1951 — Obodai counters this speed with slowness, his elemental eavesdropping characterized by returning to the same scene over and over. Remember it's not just people who can speak.

There's something unraveling in this investigation about how categories assist in the emergence of figures and how this renders certain kinds of experience visible while obscuring or making unintelligible others. Joan Scott's essay, "The Evidence of Experience" might explain it.⁹ Here Scott calls for a "genuinely nonfoundational history," one that does not simply reproduce and transmit knowledge said to be arrived at through experience but analyzes the production of that knowledge itself.¹⁰ I think about the differences between Beatty's quantitative methods and Obodai's qualitative techniques; how each is valued and attended to, and by whom. I want to avoid pursuing binaries, this isn't a whodunit, a case of guilty or innocent, victim or perpetrator, the sound this dispatch makes is discordant. Scott's essay opens with a discussion of Samuel Delany's memoir *The Motion of Light in Water*.¹¹ In a recent interview about the essay's ongoing influence upon feminist historians, Scott expands on her decision to begin with this book:

Light on water shimmers and glistens and reflects — but inaccurately (like echo for sound) — and, in the end, it can't be neatly contained or reproduced in its elusiveness; it's always

9 Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 773–97.

10 Ibid., 797.

11 Samuel R. Delany, *The Motion of Light in Water: Sex and Science Fiction Writing in the East Village, 1957–1965* (Arbor House, 1988).

moving in response to shifts in the current or the wind. That seemed right for thinking about experience both in its immediacy and in memory. I think there was something ineffable I wanted to remind historians about: that our attempts to pin down “experience” and attribute it to a set of known (usually rational) causes, was not the way to think about the history we were trying to write.¹²

How does the sonic detective deal in the ineffable, moving between immediacy and memory?

I’m chewing over this question when I contact Australian choreographer Amaara Raheem. I write her an email asking about the twenty-three days she spent at sea, aboard a container cargo ship sailing from Vancouver to Shanghai in 2016. Facilitated by Access Gallery, this artist residency program would later hit the headlines, when British artist Rebecca Moss was stranded offshore on the Hanjin Geneva, when the operating company went bankrupt. Amaara replies, her words steady and soothing, but forceful like an encroaching high tide. The resonances of movement are held in the body, its history and trajectory. How to belong and yet be transient, what international waters — the zones of the ocean beyond the territorial sea of any country — might we be able to cultivate in our minds and limbs?

As I type up my encounters, I think about what it takes for artists to be listened to, the kind of evidence they are required to produce, and how their work is so necessary now for the ways in which it can comply with — but also expose and refuse — regulatory demands. Activist, writer, and performer Xavier de Sousa’s account speaks to the value of gathering data and of the questionnaire’s legibility, enabling evidence of discrimination against migrants to be more widely and clearly heard. And yet, their interactive performances and collaborative working practices, both of which are infused with a careful and caring kind of

12 Victoria Hesford and Lisa Diedrich, “On ‘The Evidence of Experience’ and Its Reverberations: An Interview with Joan W. Scott,” *Feminist Theory* 15, no. 2 (2014): 203.

attention and empathy, also produce a queer kind of evidence. As the late scholar José Esteban Muñoz articulated, queer evidence works to “index the anecdotal, the performative or what [he calls] the ephemeral” and in doing so, strains at the limits of what might count as proof.¹³

This dispatch evidences a series of encounters between strangers, held apart by water captured in a moment of rare stillness and great global uncertainty. Tell me what you can hear. The case continues....

13 José Esteban Muñoz, “Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts,” *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (1996): 9.

DISPATCH 001

FILE NAME: Coast as Border

Location: zoom.us
 Meeting ID: 886.254.370
 Date: May 13, 2021
 Time: 10:00 a.m. BST
 Duration: 143:04 minutes
 Interviewer: Pearce, Naomi (N)
 Interviewee: de Sousa, Xavier (X)

Biographical Note:

Xavier de Sousa (he/they) is an independent performance maker and culture worker based between Brighton and Porto whose practice explores personal and political heritage in the context of discourse on belonging and migration. Through theatrical, durational performance, and moving image, they explore the dichotomies between the live experience and agency in the performance space, as well as written text and queer methodologies of performance and research. Their performance works includes a trilogy of shows about belonging and power structures, from solo theater show *POST* to

collaborative performance *Pós-* and durational performance *REGNANT*. Alongside their performance work, Xavier curates the digital research and live art commissioning platform performingborders, which includes the launch of the first e-Journal led by a living migrant artist. Their creative practice also encompasses writing, having published various creative, reflective, and research-based texts for publications such as *METAL*, *Penguin*, *Les Cahiers Luxembourgeois*, and *Centre national de littérature — Lëtzebuerger Literaturarchiv*. Xavier is a co-founder of Migrants in Culture and is a member of the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Communications, and Theatre Union (BECTU) and Independent Theatre Council (ITC).

N: You just arrived in Brighton; how do you feel? Was it difficult to leave Portugal or are you glad to be back?

X: I'm kind of conflicted. Before the pandemic hit, it was always the idea that I would be based more in Portugal, but travel between the two countries a lot, and I started this citizenship process which I'm hopefully finishing soon. I really wanted to go back to Portugal and have a different kind of life than I was having here. So, coming back, it's a bit weird, it's becoming more and more prescient how things are changing in the UK, in quite drastic ways. I was excited to come back, but now I'm here I'm a bit like, maybe my plans need to change again. I don't know if it's the process of quarantining and coming back in this way. I'm not sure if I want to stay here much longer. I'm starting to feel more rooted in Portugal after a year of being there and wanting to stay a little bit more there. So that's kind of opening discussions in my head about what I want to do and whether it still makes sense to do this bridge that I used to do before.

N: I'm interested in your evocation of the bridge, could you expand on this?

x: The bridge was a way of reconciling a past and a future I suppose. I wasn't very happy for a while in the UK and I kind of thought, what do I need to feel like I have a sense of ownership of my own life, a sense of agency? The bridge was intended to tap into my privileged position, that I have a lot of communities in both places; both artistic communities, friends, and all that, I don't want to let go of either of them, or I would like to establish relationships between them that don't exist yet. I think there's something interesting about that, being in between two worlds, because I quite enjoy being transient in both and merging them, there's something quite exciting about that, and I don't mean culturally, but just kind of existing between very different worlds and communities, because you learn a lot. You get to kind of pick what you do and what you don't want to do anymore. I think the bridge, in a way, came as an idea, because I had been doing a lot of work with performingborders, and we were moving to a digital platform, and it felt like there was a good sense of fluidity in that work and within that collaboration with Alessandra Cianetti. I could be a bit porous. So, it felt like you know, I could still work with that and expand performing-border's remit, to merge, without having to be in the UK....

N: I'm thinking about the bridge as a performance of the border and how by moving between these two places you're trying to call attention to the border. And then, by being so socially embedded in both places, you're challenging categories like "host" or "visitor," there's a certain level of intimacy and engagement that is required to do the kind of work you're doing. But what would it be to proliferate over two places or more places as a way of performing the border?

x: It is a question that we've asked ourselves, so with performingborders it is a bit easier to do that because everything happens digitally, whereas with other projects I'm involved in, such as New Queers on the Block and my own performance work, it

doesn't yet align itself to that.¹⁴ It's hard with transnational collaborations because they're expensive, and more so now. So, in a way, the best way to do it would be to establish something first in Portugal and then in the future think about uniting and creating those bridges. Because it needs to be embedded, it needs to be established in its own community already.

n: Right. It's tricky though, isn't it, because as you say, this work needs to be embedded and when we move to places and set things up, usually there are things already happening, they're just not visible to newcomers. I have these thoughts myself; in the past, I've been involved in setting up artist studio projects in London. When I moved to Glasgow to do my PhD, of course the city has this great history of artist-led activity, and instinctively I thought, oh what do I want to do... but of course there are already things happening, and perhaps it's more generous to engage in those things that are existing. Ultimately, I resisted setting my own thing up because it felt like I was just empire-building. It's such a hard line to walk.

x: It is, isn't it? I agree. I think calling it empire-building is quite interesting.... In what ways do you envisage that being so imperial?

n: I think because I was coming out of a London context where the dynamics between artist studios and galleries felt very competitive, maybe that isn't translatable across all contexts and empire-building is too strong. Also, as an English person in Scotland. It does feel very colonial, the process, due to art galleries' implication in gentrification, it's hard to shake off the transformation this kind of occupation has. Perhaps the projects you're involved with have different footprints?

14 New Queers on the Block is led by Marlborough Productions and is an LGBTQIA+ artist and community development program, embedding artists in the communities of Blackpool, Bradford, Brighton, Folkestone, and Hastings since 2018.

x: Right.

n: Yeah, but I don't want to be too hopeless; I do think there are ways of occupying space without falling into certain traps.

x: Yeah, I agree. I think it's interesting that people fall into certain patterns of behavior and methodologies that are just kind of, sometimes it's a matter of circumstance and sometimes its replicating models that are just reinforcing things. We're having discussions a lot at Marlborough Productions about how we grow, and how as a queer company we move into NPO status.¹⁵ It becomes more entrenched in inequality, it's becoming more top down and it's kind of asking a lot of questions... it's a queer company, why are we replicating imperialistic models? I know why, it's because that's the demand and that's the need to achieve something.

n: Or that's the only way you can get the support, if you speak a certain language, adhere to a language of economic benefit, cultural benefit, and community benefit. It's so complicated....

x: It is. And to bring it back a little bit to imperial models and borders, one of the things I'm stumbling on more, or is becoming more of a barrier for me, is how these models are so present in this country, I just think there is such an entrenched understanding of culture as cultural value, and production of work for the purpose of making a product, of selling a ticket, of showing a show. This is becoming more and more apparent to me, it's making me feel more and more alienated and making me think wow, I bought into this system for quite a long time. I

¹⁵ NPO status refers to National Portfolio Organisations and is a terminology brought in by the Arts Council England to determine what they describe on their website as "leaders in their areas, with a collective responsibility to protect and develop our national arts and cultural ecology." See "How Arts Council England Works with National Portfolio Organisations: Relationship Framework," https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/NPO_2018-22_Relationship_Framework.pdf.

was reticent in many ways but now it's becoming more and more impossible for me to navigate and enjoy it. Or even want to be part of it. But it's kind of that feeling of the art being imposed on you, you go into this system where the art becomes a product. It becomes about power play, who can manage it, who can do it, who has the money to do it, who has the space to do it. Who has the permission within those spaces to do it? And I think that is a consequence of those models that you were talking about.

N: How these infrastructures overlap and bleed into one another creates conditions that feel so, not trapped, but stasis, it's like every way you turn you feel backed into a corner. . . . A lot of my research is about administration, the violence of administration. There's a really good book by Dean Spade called *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law*, it focuses on trans politics and how administration prohibits freedoms, but I've found it useful, especially with Brexit, and thinking about the bureaucratic, mind-bending, often-invisible policing by the state.¹⁶ This feels more and more where attention should be focused. Which is why I think with *Migrants in Culture*, the questionnaires you produced are so effective, I'm interested in data gathering as a tool, I wonder if you could speak more about that?¹⁷

X: Yes, so *Migrants in Culture* started about two and half years ago, and it came out of a failed project [laughs]. Originally cultural organizer Joon-Lynn Goh, who's amazing by the way, reached out to a few of us about wanting to establish a school, a migrant-led, migrant-focused school. Not necessarily an art school, but a bit of everything, and we were all very excited by that idea, somewhere that could provide a good safe space to

16 Dean Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law* (Duke University Press, 2015).

17 To read the data gathered from these questionnaires see this article: *Migrants in Culture*, "Climates of Hostility: A Migrants in Culture Roundtable," *Exeunt Magazine*, October 30, 2019, <https://exeuntmagazine.com/features/climates-hostility-migrants-culture-roundtable/>.

find integration in this country. We became very quickly aware there was no data, specifically for the cultural sector, there was no data to back anything up that we were saying. We started to realize there needed to be a lot of groundwork done first. Not for us, because we know the need for it, and we know the need that artists have when we come into the country. But for everyone else, it's about, as usual, having to justify elements of our existence. So, we started asking ourselves, what is the data we need to gather? Because there's a lot of data already out there, not necessarily related to the culture sector. In the culture sector specifically we all were going through shit, this was very apparent to us individually, but we didn't know if this was happening to everyone else, so we started to talk and realized the problems we were facing were systemic. We kept getting these barriers as a group and as individuals, people kept calling us migrants inadvertently and making us feel like... oh, we don't know what we're talking about, or we don't understand this because it's in a different language than we use, or our methods of working or our ideas seem to not be so easily taken on board. So, we then started to look at how we could attack that, or highlight that, and realized that there is no information whatsoever or any knowledge or understanding of the hostile environment in this sector. For a sector that portrays itself as so open and liberal, so focused on people, there's still a lot of discrimination in the arts. There's a lot of talk about specific groups being discriminated against which is really, really great, but there is a very deep dark environment around the treatment of people who don't have the ability to stay as much as everyone else, or have their residency status in dangerous circumstances, or who are being told that, we can't put our shows on in Preston because the people there won't understand it. And I think that's really, really unacceptable.

N: Wow. Yeah.

x: So, we thought, like, let's be geeks, and to be honest, we all love our geekiness in that group [laughs], and we're like, let's get data, you know, that's the cool stuff you know.

[laughs]

N: Yeah!

x: But, as geeky as it is, and I don't mean geeky in the derogative sense at all...

N: No, of course.

x: I think that was an exciting thing because we were able to provide vital information for people to use. I think the first part of action was for us to really understand that it wasn't just us. It allows us to go to people and say no, this is what's happening and it's about time people talk about it because there is a deeply insidious kind of discrimination here that works in such minute ways, and the impact that it has is quite big, but really, most of the time it's unseen, you know, or misunderstood completely. Gathering this information gave us quite a lot of power.

N: Yeah.

x: And I think it gave the "migrant question" in the sector a robust energy that it didn't have before.

N: Right.

x: And I don't mean that in like, oh we're trailblazers and all that, it gave people the agency to be like, here's the data, I'm not being crazy. This is exactly what is happening to me, you know. Migrant-led groups are now quite visible in the sector, in interesting ways, but also, it has empowered more umbrella movements, or umbrella understandings of where discrimination is going, or how discrimination operates in the country, but

also in the sector. So, in that way, all that work has seeped into pretty much all the work that we do. Suddenly you could see a community that was invisible before.

N: Umm, hmm. Yeah. I just thought it was so inspiring to see you use this tool of the state, data collection, against them....

x: That's a good point that you touched on, one of the things we found out that we didn't know about before, was there is no actual definition of migrant in the UK and that this is a tool that the Home Office uses to loosen up the parameters of how they operate. I really wanted to tackle that and use the data against that.

N: Yes!

x: And demand, or call in for a recognition of that, because otherwise, if we continually operate in a gray area, like the UK does, because it's really interesting, the context of the UK in this, because it's like the UK doesn't have a constitution it has a set of laws that are also enacted according to past enactments of the law.

N: Oh, right, ok.

x: I've forgotten what the terminology is... you must have precedent, it's based on precedent, it's like ok, now there's a precedent growing here that we can highlight. Because if you're working with a gray area, what is deemed a gray area by the government, by the state. Then your ground is shifting. You have less power. You need a firm base underneath you, and I don't mean about belonging, it's about having a safe base that can go on, this is what we are operating as, and the state must recognize that, and we won't stop until that's the case. You know.

N: Right. Thinking about language as something which provides access, enabling the crossing of borders, I wanted to ask about

your recent sound piece for *Triptyphon* written and interpreted in English, Portuguese, and Iraqi Arabic languages in collaboration with Tara Jaffar and Florence Klaus. I really liked this work and I wondered if you could speak to the way language can dissolve or reinforce the violence of borders?

x: That was an interesting thing because Larisa Faber, who commissioned the piece, got in touch, she asked if I wanted to do a bit more writing, the piece was framed in a way that was like, you do the writing and then someone else will interpret it in their own way, so removing the border of the performer having to interpret it as you want to. And I was like, oh that's really liberating for me as a writer. I think sometimes... there's such an empirical way of looking at artwork, you know, this is my work you must look at this way. I wanted to reflect on how sometimes language displaces us or puts a protective shield around us. I think the process was really fascinating because I wrote it in Portuguese and then in English, to replicate what goes on in a state of linguistic limbo, of flux, that you constantly navigate between languages and you kind of create your own sometimes, and you make up words that don't exist in either, but they sort of make sense in both. [laughs]

And then Tara, who is Iraqi, said, do you think I could put some music behind it, but how the hell am I going to interpret the Portuguese passages? Then I realized the Portuguese passages seemed to be the more introspective ones, that wasn't a conscious thing when I was writing it, but it became apparent to me during our conversation. Tara asked to translate them into Iraqi Arabic, and it became about reflecting the intention rather than necessarily the words. It felt like an illustration of how sometimes we're so confined by understandings of what language is, which is a shame because language is constantly evolving, right? I think there's something quite exciting about it, you know when you're hearing someone talk in English in a very different accent, or the language is their second or third language and their English is so imperfect, but you understand that person. There is something quite interesting about that kind of

listening, I think when you speak in a more fluid language then the act of listening becomes more imperative to you, because you must understand that person, you must give time to that person and I think that's quite amazing, that kind of connection or that kind of demand.

N: Yes. There are different ways of listening, the way she was listening was not about the actual words that you were saying, it was more about the resonance or the sentiment producing them....

x: Yeah. It's about that. When you communicate, when you deal with other people it's about that connection, it's about relatability, it's about empathy. Whenever we approach an artwork or an art piece, or even when we approach another person you create points of empathy or points of connection, even if you don't want to. But that felt to me like this is what we were stepping into. But it was an understanding, so many times you hear, or you see images or videos, in front of you people talking in different languages but you know exactly what they are talking about, you know what they are feeling when they say it. That, I think, is so beautiful.

N: Yeah.

x: Hmm.

N: To change direction slightly, although staying with this idea of embodied languages, I loved the film *Lavender Man* by Tania El Khoury commissioned for performingborderslive2020.¹⁸ At one point, a caption appears on screen, less a question more a lament: "Will we be able to work in the same way again, with local communities, with crowds, intimately and internation-

18 Tania El Khouri, "Lavender Man | Performance to Camera," *performingborders*, 2020, <https://performingborders.live/commissions/lavender-man-performance-to-camera-by-tania-el-khouri/>.

ally?” I found it very moving watching these two performers yearn for physical proximity, while also sensing their love and friendship for one another penetrating the screen.

x: Yes, that whole piece, it really moved us all. The whole process of getting to the final piece... I'm getting goosebumps just thinking about it. It was such a process, a delicate process....

n: Yes.

x: Originally, we wanted perhaps Tania to travel a bit, to have more of a collaboration with Dali, and you know what it ended up being was more of a digital reflection, because of consequences of the pandemic but also because of what happened in Lebanon last summer—the explosion—Tania was in the city when that happened. It was a really difficult process and there was a fear that Dali could be put in a really dangerous position in Malta, with his residency status there. Or for Tania to be put in a difficult position with the authorities in Lebanon because of the conversations we were having which is one of the reasons why Dali was stuck in Malta for so long in the first place you know, he was arrested and kept there as an asylum seeker.

n: Of course. So, you commissioned Tania before the pandemic?

x: We had our first conversation in March, just as the pandemic was starting. There were a lot of questions about how we would communicate it to the press, how much visibility we gave it, and what resources we had available. There was a lot more infrastructure and care that needed to happen for Dali and Tania. The final piece was very in line with what had been planned, it was just the trajectory of getting there, navigating, and understanding the different contexts of where the work was happening. It raised a lot of questions and barriers about people's safety, and what the purpose of the artwork is, is it about highlighting a situation or is it about reflecting on it? Is it about the work that the two of them had done before or is it about establishing new

horizons for them? I don't think we've answered many of those questions, it was more about going through them. I thought it was so beautifully handled by Tania and Dali; it became empathetic. So much went into it, the history of the project or without putting the pandemic and an explosion in the middle of it, somehow the human empathy....

N: The spirit?

X: The spirit of that was at the forefront of it. Artistically it was one of my proudest moments, making that piece happen.

N: Yes, it's so powerful. These questions, about what the consequences are of making this kind of work — both for the performers but also the producers — these kinds of conversations aren't really had in public. You know, what it takes, to put on this kind of work and what's at stake.

X: What press you're going into, what press you're not going into, how you're going to write the copy for it, what imagery you use, where you use these things, because you want to protect it....

N: People's lives are at stake....

X: Absolutely. This became at the forefront of everything we did last year. Not just with this project, but with all the performing-borders projects, a lot of it became about ensuring people could survive and have safe ways of living. Not that I think we changed people's lives per say, but it was a question, all of a sudden, we had to think of people's safety much more than before, and how that affected creative conditions.

N: What I loved about it was that it didn't feel compromised by Zoom — it was one of the first works I've seen where the staging didn't detract from the work but heightened the sense of longing shared by the two performers... the medium performed

the border with such affect. It felt like their movements really captured the emotion of separation.

x: I agree it's so interesting to see them in unison, it kind of highlights the cross-border relationships, connection and communities that continue to exist even in adverse circumstances like this. It highlighted their shared history, all they have gone through, and how much they love working with each other, and understand each other.

n: Totally. My final question, who are we not listening to?

x: Quite a lot of people. We're not listening to the people who don't know how things work or know how things work but not in the way we understand them. People who don't have access to tools or education or to the sector that allows them to make work in a way that is more fluid or sustainable. I'm talking about people going through the asylum-seeking process, talking about working-class people who don't have access to education. I'm talking about migrants who come into this country and have a whole different culture to navigate and systems to navigate and cultural understandings of systems to navigate. So, I think we're not listening to people who sit outside of the norm. We're addressing them in the cultural sector, but we're not really embedding them. That's one of the big scandals of our time, is that these conversations around movements and diversity and inclusion — a lot of these are being done as dressing opportunities for already existing systems.

DISPATCH 002

FILE NAME: Coast as Leisure Resort

Location: zoom.us
 Meeting ID: 886.254.370
 Date: May 25, 2021
 Time: 10:00 a.m. BST
 Duration: 85:00 minutes
 Interviewer: Pearce, Naomi (N)
 Interviewee: Beatty, Christina (C)

Biographical Note:

Christina Beatty is a British economic geographer and Professor of Applied Economic Geography in the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University. Her work focuses on the dynamics of labor market participation and welfare reform to understand the spatial impacts of policy. She co-authored with Professor Steve Fothergill *England's Seaside Towns: A "Benchmark-*

ing” Study.¹⁹ This was followed by a second report, also co-authored with Steve Fothergill, *Seaside Towns in the Age of Austerity*.²⁰

N: How did you first become interested in British seaside towns?

C: Ok, well, Steve (Steve Fothergill) and I were doing a lot of work in the 1990s looking at hidden unemployment. We were primarily looking at British coalfield areas but also doing an exercise across the whole of Britain, looking at how there’d been a diversion of people out of unemployment into long-term sickness benefits. So, whenever we used to do our maps of unemployment and labor market distress, what we’d always see is the hot spots around the coast, around the big seaside towns. And we’d say, hang on a sec, what’s going on in those places? In our older industrial areas, there was a story you understood, basically, all the mines are closed, older industries are breaking down or closing, all these older men are being shoved out of their jobs, they’ve got illnesses and stuff, so they end up on one benefit rather than another. But with seaside towns, they didn’t have a massive loss of a labor market share, they didn’t have an explanation readily available to us, there’s not a collapse of industry, what’s going on? So, we put in for an ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) grant to look at British seaside towns and part of the reason we felt they weren’t being looked at was there wasn’t a definition.²¹

N: Interesting. Without a definition, these places weren’t visible?

19 Christina Beatty, Steve Fothergill, and Ian Wilson, *England’s Seaside Towns: A “Benchmarking” Study* (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008).

20 Christina Beatty, Steve Fothergill, and Tony Gore, *Seaside Towns in the Age of Austerity: Recent Trends in Employment in Seaside Tourism in England and Wales* (Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, 2014).

21 The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). UKRI is a non-departmental public body funded by the UK government. ESRC was founded in 1965 and provides funding and support for research and training in the social sciences.

c: We're quantitative researchers, everything we tend to be counting is things; people, phenomena, labor market things in particular areas, especially with secondary data and administrative data, so claimant statistics, stuff like that. But there was no off-the-peg definition of what constitutes seaside towns, and there is still a blurring, is it coastal, or what? So, we basically made a pitch for a two-year ESRC grant, which said one, how do you know what's going on in these places if you can't define them, and then two, what is the situation with the labor market, why were there higher levels of hidden unemployment and higher levels of incapacity benefits? So that was how we got into it. It was one of those research moments when you think, oh, why is that doing that? And then you think, oh right, let's do a funding bid to find out why....

N: In terms of your research process how does it work, are you ever on the ground or are you primarily based remotely? Does your interest in seaside towns stem from having a relationship with these places?

c: It's both. So even though I'm a statistician and very much doing desk-based research, from the initial point of this project we were driving around, visiting seaside towns. We'd sent out letters to local authorities saying, "we want to do this piece of research, and why we're interested in doing it." We didn't send it to all of them, we sent it to the ones we thought would be interested, but they all came back and said yes, so we did a road trip and went round to you know, Great Yarmouth, up to Skeggy,²² we went to Blackpool. So, one time or another I've stayed in all of them. When I do the surveys, again, it makes it sound ancient now, but we used to literally get maps from the library and draw, get your E.D (Enumeration District) map from the census and put tracing paper around the big maps and then work out your

22 Skeggy is a nickname for Skegness, a town on the east coast of England.

address list like that.²³ It wasn't just a postcode, look up the table and then you've got it. Even how we defined the seaside towns in the first place was with physical maps, we updated them subsequently, it's moved to GIS (Geographic Information System) but the original way we mapped them all is by getting smaller area maps and looking at the boundaries of the towns, going back to 1974, before there was a major government reorganization.²⁴ So, we'd spend hours drawing on tracing paper and looking at the stats and saying, "oh this one is this and we'll include that one, and that's where the real town is." Because we don't want the local authority as it is now, because obviously a lot of them, the surrounding hinterland is big rural areas, or you know in Brighton it's like a big city....

N: Or with Greater Bournemouth, for instance....

CB: Yes exactly, you can't just separate them off, Greater Brighton, Greater Bournemouth, or Greater Blackpool, they're bits of three local authorities each of those, but it's still not the whole local authority, it's the actual town, we've used the word resort, they're primarily places that have had a function as a seaside resort, at a particular time. So, they're not just a coastal town, or a place by the sea, they're not just a fishing port, or a transport hub, it's not just to do with size, it's something to do with their function primarily.

N: Like leisure?

C: Yeah, like a seaside destination, a place that has quite a long, historical past, as a seaside destination. I mean when we were doing the big ones most of them have a pier; that makes them obvious, but they are very much places people went on holiday

23 An Enumeration District was a geographical area where an enumerator, or census taker, collected information about everyone living in that area.

24 Geographic Information System (GIS) is software that blends the power of a map with the power of a database to allow people to create, manage, and analyze information, particularly information about location.

to. They're not just a seaside town. So, lots of bits of Cornwall are now very touristy, like fishing villages and stuff like that, they're not in our definition.

N: Interesting.

C: When we got commissioned, we did a follow up study for the government, for DEFRA, which is the Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs and CLG (Communities and Local Government), they funded us to define the smaller seaside towns, so we did that. We had our original big towns and then we defined the smaller towns, we did another benchmarking study for the government, so they could understand them, and then we had an extra definition after that which was like Caravan parks, because there are bits of Skegness that have Butlins. They are a seaside destination specifically because of that, but we give them a different label. So, we have subcategories. I haven't visited all my places, but I have visited and holidayed in quite a few of them or been to them to give talks on the research. When we do the research, we tend to do visits over time, specifically to the ones in the study, to do the groundwork for the surveys, go out and meet the Field Force. We tend to go out when the Field Force are out and do debriefings there.

N: What or who is the Field Force?

C: Well, they're the people who are doing, you know the people who, when you're doing a big survey... we'll hire a survey company, like I think the last one was BMG, before that there was one at the university.²⁵ And there might be half a dozen people who go for the week with the address list because it's a proper random sample survey, they basically get given a whole load of lists of addresses, and all these addresses have been sent a let-

25 BMG Research is one of the largest market research agencies in the UK. See "Contacted by us," BMG, <https://www.bmgresearch.co.uk/have-you-been-contacted-by-us/>.

ter saying “we’re undertaking this research, someone is going to call,” and then they literally have to go and knock on every door and get the numbers to fill in. I think we had over a thousand in the first survey, they’re quite big-scale surveys.

N: When reading the reports, I was struck by the differences in what constitutes a seaside town, first in scale, but also across all the categories such as employment, qualifications, benefits, skills, etc. I wondered to what extent “seaside town” was a useful term, potentially it’s so broad it becomes unwieldy.

C: I think it is useful to get people to pay attention to these places. In some senses, what you find with Westminster and what you find with many of the people, no matter where they’re meant to be from or where they’re located, they are very London-centric. They are very Southern-centric. The Westminster bubble isn’t a fiction, it’s a real thing. So, anything that brings a focus on place. I think most government policy is very un-spatial. They just do national policy and they don’t think about place. They don’t seem to understand there are some seaside towns which have real, serious, long-term issues to do with the housing, labor market, benefit claimants, deterioration, all those sorts of things. There are a particular set of things going on with these seaside towns, and some of it is to do with their peripheral locations, the very nature of them being over there, you know Great Yarmouth, have you ever been to Great Yarmouth?

N: I haven’t, but my friend is from Great Yarmouth, and he talks a lot about it being peripheral....

C: They’re literally stuck out there on the heel! Norwich is probably not that far, but it’s not easy to get to once you’re there, it’s very much a place and then there is rural nothingness. It’s got a very distinct character, there is this influx of people, who still go there for day trips or holidays. It’s a place time has forgotten a bit. The world has passed it by. But its peripheral location, I mean when we used to have meetings in Great Yarmouth, you’d

have to build in two days in and around. It's not easy to get to by train, by car, or by anything. It really is difficult. Skeggy is the same. So, I think being peripheral is important. Even when we do stuff to do with functional labor markets, or catchment, like a big urban city, a big core city, it will have this surrounding hinterland of people it serves, who might come in for the big services and shops... and you see, seaside towns have only got half of this, their other half is out in the sea!

N: Of course!

C: So straight away they've lost half of that!

N: I think this sense of the definition making these places visible is clearly why it's useful. One other aspect I wanted to ask about is thinking about the enduring myths or misconceptions of the British seaside. Is there something romantic about "seaside towns" as a term? It's evocative, it immediately puts images in people's minds which something like "coastal towns" doesn't quite do.

C: Yes, this is interesting. In the original ERSC study we did, we asked survey participants how long they'd lived in the area and how they'd come into the area, the amount of them in Blackpool who say, "oh, well when I was a child and I lived in Manchester we always stayed in Blackpool for our holiday." Historically, the factories in and around the north, they'd have Wake's week, they did it in Sheffield for instance; the steel industry closes, everybody has the same holiday, the same week and they go to Blackpool or Skeggy, or in Liverpool they all went to Rhyl.

Steve and I have a book called the *AA Book of the Seaside: A Mile-by-Mile Guide to Britain's Coastline*. It's like an old-fashioned, big sort of tome, and on the front there's a picture of a child riding a donkey on the beach, it's from 1972, it gives you a little overview of every seaside town where people would go on holiday. When we did our mapping definition and looked at the data and decided who was in and out, we'd use that as our

reference point if there was one, we weren't sure about we'd have a look and when it would say "it's got a pier" we'd say, "yeah that's in." Because it had the function, it had a history of being a resort. I think people think that all seaside towns are run down, and they have the view of Blackpool being what all of them are, and it's not true. I think people have the view they've all got problems and they haven't. The reports we did on the tourism industry tried to show, it's still growing, and it's not gone.

N: I was really shocked to read that tourism was a bigger employer than the automobile industry or pharmaceuticals, on a par with the telecommunications industry. That was a surprise to me.

C: Yes, they weathered the last recession quite well. I'm assuming they'll have a boom time this year....

N: In the reports, what really hits you is the numbers. The scale of your research and the crystallizing of it into a set of data points, the hard facts of your outcomes. What it is about numbers that makes people listen?

C: It's a very good point. When you try and shift policy makers or government, often they will pay attention to "it's X thousands of people," rather than "I spoke to 3 people." Being able to do the scale as well as the depth tells you more, being able to look at all seaside towns creates an evidence base that is quite strong compared to if we just did a case study on one of them. Most of the research we do at CRESR, especially for national government, is a mixed method approach, quantitative and qualitative. So qualitative is important because it does give you that real story, the depth, having a great quote off somebody that really sums up the nature of their life in a couple of lines is brilliant, but being able to say "there's two million people using food banks," they actually see the weight. There's strength of having the quants and the quals, the numbers make them see the scale relative to other things. Think of COVID-19, you know, when people see a

number coming up on their screens every night saying another two thousand people have died, it's scary isn't it, it sort of brings it home, and I think that's the nature of government in a way. Because most of the time they're prioritizing what they spend their money on or how big a problem it is, or how much they need to worry about it, because they don't have money to tackle everything. So, having evidence, especially numbers, allows people who are then trying to lobby or put in funding bids. All those places that will now be putting in small town funds or the shared prosperity fund, the first thing they will be doing when they're making their case is not putting the story of the hurt individual, they will be putting that here, in my area, its X thousand people, its ten percent of my working-age population. And in some senses, this is how those sorts of funding regimes expect it.

N: How does it feel to see all your research compressed into a two-page report?

C: Well, Steve and I would both be of the opinion that if you get to the end of the ESRC project and the real important nub of what you've done fits into one or two pages, you've done it right! If you can consolidate it down that means, it's a success. Which I think can be harder with qualitative stuff at times. For the seaside towns ESRC project, we did something called Labor Marking Accounts, which is where you look at flows in the labor market over the time. It takes me six to eight months to get all the data sorted, all the calculations, it's really complex, thousands of spreadsheets and downloads and all this, and then when it all comes together, at the end I literally have a piece of A4 with this table which has seven components: job growth, population growth, migration, commuting out, commuting in, unemployment, and economic inactivity and then I'll have my seaside towns and this is it, you know, it's literally in a table. But that's good, because a government minister won't read a one-hundred-page report, they'll read a one-page, two-page execu-

tive summary and that's it. That's the art of it. Getting it down to a couple of pages.

N: If we've established governments listen to numbers, who or what are we not listening to?

C: I suppose at times, it's important to listen to the people who live in the places. So, I suppose it's trying to capture the essence of that. I do it on the macro level by trying to count everybody and show their labor market stuff or I try and capture all seaside towns, I suppose it's trying to listen to the different types of places. Oh, I'm not sure. I suppose it depends on who your audience is, I mean who is the who doing the listening? If it's the government, they need to listen or be aware of that subset of seaside towns that have got long-term, persistent problems, the Blackpools, the Great Yarmouths, not the Brightons. That's a different kettle of fish. But I think they will often think of Brighton as being a typical seaside town when it's not.

N: Right. Are there any final comments or thoughts you'd like to add?

C: You know when you were saying "do you have an affinity to this place," well, my mum and dad were both born and brought up on a small island off the coast of Ireland, near the Aran Islands. It's called Lettermore, all Gaelic speaking, it's probably not even five miles across. It's attached to land by a stone bridge. So, it's an island, but it's across a bridge. And have you ever seen the film *The Guard*? With Brendan Gleeson?

N: No, but I know Brendan Gleeson....

C: Ok, that is set on Lettermore, and the first murder takes place on the bridge. So, I go there every year, that's my summer holiday every year, I got engaged on that island, I found out I was pregnant there, it's like my... I was meant to be going last summer but obviously we've not been able to go. So, we all go as a

family regularly and I still have lots of... the last time I went I saw ten aunties and uncles within a four-day visit. All in and around the island, because they're both from the same place so that thing of living next to the coast, my mum's house, granny's house, is like a whitewashed stone cottage, like you'd see on a postcard. Dry stone walls with their turfs stacked up, so you know, maybe six feet that way is the stone wall and if you look over the stone wall is the sea and if you kept swimming you'd get to America. So, in some senses that thing of...

N: The periphery!

C: The periphery and the sea, and although I now live in a land-locked place, I do have a... it does affect you and your life, how you see the world.

DISPATCH 003

FILE NAME: Coastal Elements as Eavesdropping Allies

Location: zoom.us
 Meeting ID: 886.254.370
 Date: May 24, 2021
 Time: 11:00 a.m. BST
 Duration: 125:04 minutes
 Interviewer: Pearce, Naomi (NP)
 Interviewee: Obodai, Nii (NO)

Biographical Note:

Nii Obodai is a Ghanaian photographer. His project *Of Natural Magic* documented the waterways of East Riding, Yorkshire and was supported by Invisible Dust, a UK-based commissioning organization working with artists and scientists to explore our environment and climate change. Obodai's year-long residency explored the way people have interacted with, exploited, controlled, and lived with water, specifically the Gypsy Race, Spurn Point, Tophill Low, and Pocklington Canal. The resulting photographs and audio works

were exhibited at Beverley Art Gallery from September 21 to November 23, 2019.

NP: I didn't see *Of Natural Magic* in person, but I've been trying to reconstruct the experience through online materials. An interdisciplinary way of working seems very important to your process and this project. What kinds of results does this interdisciplinary conversation produce?

NO: In the beginning when the inquiry came, I thought okay, I'm very happy to do it because it helps break down the stereotypes, this idea you're an "African photographer" so all your work needs to be done in Africa, about Africa. I think it was important not just for me but for other photographers and artists on the continent to break those boundaries. So, I met with Invisible Dust, and I said listen, we must understand that firstly, England plays a big role in the history of photography, Fox Talbot was instrumental, he's the father of silver-based photography in England. All this will lead up to answering the question, I promise! [laughs]. I just want to take us through the history, the process we went through in realizing the commission [pauses]. A big part of me wanted to go back to these processes because I'm a film-based photographer, I've done very few works with digital cameras, I wanted to honor that tradition, coming back to England, honoring the process and the ancestry. I wanted to up the game a bit and use a larger format, because the Fox Talbot tradition meant working with contact prints and salt printing.²⁶ I've only experimented with salt printing in the past, many years ago... are you, you there? I wasn't sure if you'd frozen.

NP: Oh no, I'm here, I'm listening.

26 In 1834–1835 English Scientist and Inventor William Henry Fox Talbot developed an advanced concept of photography on paper and a method of stabilizing both photograms and camera images using a solution of sodium chloride. Salt prints were the first negative-to-positive photographic technique.

NO: Oh you are, ha, and yes, so those sorts of limitations demanded that I would go into a state of learning. I also wanted to use the commission to find a fellow photographer who was living in the area who could mentor me and had a deep knowledge of salt printing with large format photography. This brought me in contact with a great photographer David Charmers, who then happened to be my neighbor when I moved to Scarborough. So, we developed a very close relationship and respect for each other, I learnt a lot from him. From the sonic point of view because I wanted to build soundscapes, I also decided I needed to learn something new because I'd been sort of self-learning in Ghana; buying a recorder, going out and recording, which is fine, but I also wanted to see how far I could go with sound recordings if I worked with someone who could also mentor me in that space. So, with Rob McKay, who was teaching and researching at the University of Leeds, I discovered I could do underwater recordings as well. And as the project evolved, I started fusing the two, plus building the interdisciplinary relationships. Because you must learn to communicate with people and extract information from them, which also becomes part of the collaborative process, because they inform, and they also guide the work as well.

NP: I love the idea of this state of learning as the headspace to be making work, this feels important. It's exciting. Maybe this is something that working with other disciplines affords? When I've done interdisciplinary work in the past you have to try and figure out how to communicate, you forget how restrictive each discipline's language is and you spend your time trying to find common ground to understand one another. This also feels like something which happens in coastal sites, in the waterways, with all the volunteers and having to negotiate the landscape together. Reading about the project, it feels like your methods mirror what happens on a day-to-day basis in these areas. Do you have any thoughts on this?

NO: It's important for the process to be as organic as possible from multiple directions. You can't go into an area or communities and assume you are coming in with the knowledge. I also take this position because if you look at how Africa has been documented by Europeans... image makers, explorers, colonizers, whoever has come in the past, came with a fixed idea and so whatever they produced out of Africa was based on those parameters within the regime of already-set perceptions. In a way they fooled themselves, they robbed themselves of getting to know the space, because they informed themselves of what they already had in their heads. So how do I step out of that? How do I, as somebody who has been affected by that way of looking at the world, step out of it and because England is instrumental in the dominance of Africa by European countries, right? It just made total sense to turn, to flip it upside down. I must come in with a state of questioning and being open to learn from people what their lives are about. And of course, I'm coming in with my own impressions. I grew up in England, I went to school in England, but I must disconnect myself from that as much as possible to allow for a state of renewal to take place, right? And not to take the situation for granted and not to take my own position for granted. And so that also meant because I'm aware of my own physicality within the space and realizing how much I had to learn about how I was seeing things, how I needed to go beyond what I was seeing or beyond what I knew. That's exciting, because then, you're open to wonderful things happening which feeds your creative process and helps you build meaningful relationships. If you come in already with what you think or what you know people are going to figure that out and they're not going to give you the intimate knowledge they have right? They're their own cultural experiences or history or context because you'll come in as an expert.

[Both laugh]

NP: Yes, right, you must build trust.

NO: Yes. And there's no way I could come in as an expert. I asked myself, who are the custodians of history? It's not the academic research historian I'm looking for, I'm looking for people who have generations of history built within them. So that's the families who have for many generations lived in these spaces, stories have been told from one generation to another, they've been part of the process of evolving and maintaining communities. I also need to go beyond what you see and so for that to happen, to enter the invisible realm, you also have to talk to people who have spiritual connections with communities and with the landscape, right, and so then I said to myself, who are the oldest spiritual groups in England and of course it would be the pagans and in many ways they mirror spiritual practitioners in Africa and from anywhere else in the world, in terms of how they communicate with landscape and what we'll call the invisible and physical realms. So, we had to also seek out pagan groups we could work with, that I could have discussions with.

Of course, the environmentalists who were working in the area, some of them in the academic space and some of them in the layman's space, people who enjoy their environment and contribute to it in different ways, these relationships had to be built, trust had to be built, and requests for support had to be initiated as well. When it came to making the photographs — for I didn't start photographing for a while — it really was a positive experience because people were primed to understand what I was doing, and you know I'm a complete stranger, that's clear from the way I look and the way I talk and to my purpose. So of course, for many people it was quite strange to see me photographing the landscape, walking round with a hefty eight-by-ten Deardorff camera and equipment across East Yorkshire. I think the positive thing was, people were inspired to inquire, and were inspired by the physicalness of the camera, reviving it, many people hadn't seen cameras like this for a long time. Or didn't even know that cameras like this existed. So, the camera itself also generated dialogue, it generated interest.

NP: I was thinking about how the historical photographic process may have allowed for different conversations, perhaps it can allow the viewer to meet the photograph in a different way? It's not documentary, it's transformed into something else, which allows for an alternative kind of exchange. Does that make sense?

NO: Absolutely. Because it is a slow process, it can take a week to get the image you want, and you're right the whole point was not to create something that was photographically perfect in its representation but allowed for interpretation and allowed for connection to take place at a different level. I think that's what salt printing does, it's very simple, it's organic and it fits into our current situation of environmental concerns and thinking about the consequences of how we work. So, I think for a lot of people, when we got into the discussions about the process there was a lot of appreciation for it, especially with the outcome.

One of the things I decided to do once I understood how to use my sound equipment was to record each waterway, so each has its own signature sound. This was part of the auditory visualization of these entities because these entities are alive in their own right; they are for many of us around the world. Water bodies are spiritual entities, people communicate with them, they live with them, they transport themselves on them, water has such multi-functional aspects to our lives, we know that. We often don't listen to the inside of water, we listen from the outside, so it's interesting to go into water and hear what water has to say.

NP: Trying to get the most accurate portrait of the river by using its own material in the making process. I love this idea. I do a lot of situated writing, sitting for long periods of time in particular places and practicing close observation, a kind of notion that records the atmospheric and material qualities of a site. You forget how strange this practice can look, most people don't just sit in a place and record a river or sit there writing. It basically becomes an excuse for people to talk to you.

NO: Yes, it is! Working with the soundscapes was really, really important, as a way to give a more rounded experience of the images. And there was something else that happened, you know, you're experimenting, and you're working with different ideas and methods, and then suddenly it locks down and something new comes out. And so, just before we mounted the exhibition, I was still printing and I realized ah, if each river has a different voice, then how would that translate to the printing process. What if I took the water from each river — which I'd been collecting because I wasn't sure what I was going to do with these waters, so I had a collection of waters, and I was like, well, silver nitrate is actually really sensitive to pollutants, to get a good silver nitrate salt print you need to make sure your papers are as pure as possible. So, you're using art paper that is acid free, and free of chemical pollutants. I said to myself if all these different rivers and water supply systems have their own sonic vibrations that means they are going to have a different signature with silver nitrate and so what I did was not only using salt from the North Sea but taking these waters as the mixing medium for the silver nitrate and salt solution, to make a complete print.

NP: Amazing. And were there different aesthetic effects?

NO: Yes, it was a nice surprise actually.

NP: I'm interested in the differences between your chosen water bodies and how you selected the sites. Was it about trying to get a combination of social, political, or aesthetic histories? Can you speak about your reasoning behind choosing Spurn Point, Top Hill Low, Pocklington Canal, and Gypsey Race?

NO: Well, I mean, once you get on the ground you realize the East Riding area is huge, it's a massive place, so that was part of the problem, because in the beginning you're excited, and you're like wow I've got all this space to play, and then of course logistically it becomes quite difficult. I had to research which would be the best places to work with and develop an intimate

knowledge of these places. I couldn't just give snapshots of lots of places, it would be meaningless, they would just be snapshots. That's why Top Hill Low came in because it was special, it was a natural reserve built around a reservoir, a major water reservoir system that supplies Hull, it's a very special place.²⁷ And then of course there was Spurn Point, it's ever changing, with the corrosive situation and tidal waves. So, it was also not just looking at the effects but also, what efforts people were making in terms of adapting or conserving these places. Because of course, East Riding is the fastest eroding coastline in Europe and there's been a lot of imaging made about this. Everybody knows it's corroding; everybody sees it's corroding. So, I didn't focus too much attention on that, I thought the deeper story for me was what was taking place inland and how people were adapting to these changes across multiple locations.

NP: Can you take me through your experience of photographing this landscape? What was it like physically, were the days long, how did the sites react to your presence? Most of the spots aren't very accessible either?

NO: No.

NP: So, you have to walk to them, it's a kind of pilgrimage to the photograph.

NO: Yeah, if you want to know the landscape you don't drive to the place to photograph, you must walk to discover what is necessary. It's not what you need that you meet. So, some days I would be trekking nine to twelve miles a day with all this equip-

27 Tophill Low is a Nature Reserve and Site of Special Scientific Interest in East Riding, Yorkshire. It is also an active Yorkshire Water treatment works, which was built in 1959. It formally opened as a nature reserve in 1993 and features twelve hides spread across a 300-acre site that flanks the river Hull. See "Tophill Low Nature Reserve," *Yorkshire Water*, <https://www.yorkshirewater.com/things-to-do/reservoirs/tophill-low-nature-reserve/>.

ment. In terms of schedule, say if I'm working in Top Hill, I had to negotiate times that were convenient to the crew who were working there, the volunteers and the administration, the same with Spurn Point. So basically, with Spurn, they looked at it like an artistic residency period for me, so I could go there for one or two nights and sleep there, they provided rooms for me to stay in. I think I had three or four visits, to wait for the right light, to work with the light, you can see contrast levels are low, in Top Hill there was a lot of waiting because you want to include a lot of bird life as well. You can't get birds to pose for you.

[Laughs]

NO: With weather conditions the visual conditions are constantly changing. You come one, two days, all you're doing is observing, and learning to be comfortable in the space. Learning to see in space. Learning how the environment talks to you. And because then you've got to ask questions, you can go to them and say, "this is what I've seen," "this is what I'm interested in, can you tell me some more?" Or listen to their stories about it or let them take you to places and then you have to spend time not only with their stories but then find your own stories within the space as well. So, it does take quite a bit of time, it does. You spend a lot of time contemplating.

NP: Which brings us to slowness, the slow attention of this project seems crucial. Critic Arden Reed uses the term "slow art" to describe "the dynamic, intimate encounter between object and observer," focusing on the action of engaging with artworks rather than their aesthetic. "Artworks," he writes, "wait mutely — patiently — for us to animate them. As beholders, we actually perform artworks, as though they were musical scores. Then (dead, static) images become events. Observed over time, paintings behave like slow-motion moving pictures."²⁸ Do you

28 Arden Reed, "On Slow Art: Introduction," *The Brooklyn Rail*, September 2017, <https://brooklynrail.org/2017/09/editorsmessage/Introduction-by-Arden-Reed>.

have any thoughts about these ideas and the notion of artworks as events?

NO: Um, I'll jump into the middle of it — the dead, static images, how they just become events. I think that's important. For sure it's the beholder who makes art live. It's the one who comes to engage with it, and is either inspired or challenged by the art. I think, that's when as you say, the slow-motion moving pictures, if you're looking at it from, say, the public context, where art is available to enjoy in museums, and you go through the mental and physical engagement with the art and then you have to leave it behind, that art continues to play with you, to communicate with you. It takes something with you. If you see how Fox Talbot influences me, and, say, maybe landscape painters like Turner in England, and I try to fuse that, I mean that's art speaking to me but many centuries down the line. But also know, once you engage with it art lives, it's a communication, it's consciousness. [pause]. I like this illusion of it being like musical scores, a lot of the time it is, it's the visual playing out compositions for us to engage with. And every element that makes the image is its own signature note.

NP: And I enjoy the tension between the photograph being one moment captured, fixed, but then through its encounter with viewer it becomes an event again, it becomes live. You can't slow down how you listen, or can you? Is there something to be gained from lingering in listening. Does the slower process attune our attention? Although your work is visual, it feels like what you're doing is listening to the landscape, listening to the people you're encountering, listening to the materials. So, it feels like a more holistic sensory experience.

NO: No, you can't slow down how you listen, but you can be more thoughtful. You can be aware of what you're listening to. You can be aware of how the environment impacts your auditory senses, which automatically translates into emotion. There's nothing we listen to that doesn't have an emotional response.

You hear somebody banging a pot, it irritates you, you hear a baby laughing, you're full of joy, you see a painting you're in awe of, you're taking a photograph and the click of the shutter gives you a feeling of satisfaction. It's not a question of slowing down your listening, it's how do I listen with a deeper awareness? And that might induce a slowing down because you are now taking the time to be less distracted... oh yeah, there's a little bird out there, the workman has stopped their noise. Listening becomes an artform in itself. Most of us have this ability and you can turn that into an artistic practice when you record and share it, then it becomes art.

NP: Lastly, who or what are we not listening to?

[Laughs]

NO: I think at the end of the day you're not listening to yourself. So, when you disconnect from listening to what's around you, you're not listening to yourself, because everything that's taking place around you is intricately connected to you, so the moment we stop listening, and again I'm going to use this idea of the conflict we have between ourselves and our relationship with the environment, we have over time learned not to listen to ourselves. When you meet the other, you've already made assumptions about them, so even when they vocalize who they are, you fail to hear what they are saying, so you dive into a relationship with somebody whether it be amorous or not, or platonic and you've already set these assumptions about them, but you don't know how their heartbeat sounds, you assume their heartbeat is in tune with you, you assume their body language is in tune with you, you assume the values you say, you share, you make assumptions about those values, until one day all of a sudden, oh my god no! This person is not like that. We create confusion, confusion doesn't happen by itself, we create the confusion. You know. For me I would say, you haven't learned to listen to yourself. If you haven't learned to listen to yourself, you're not going to be able to listen to anything else.

DISPATCH 004

FILE NAME: Coast as Logistics Hub

Location: Email correspondence
 Date: July 21, 2021 and August 29, 2021
 Interviewer: Pearce, Naomi
 Interviewee: Raheem, Amaara

Biographical Note:

Amaara Raheem is a Sri Lankan-born Australian dance-artist, currently based part-time in Wurundjeri country (Melbourne) and part-time in Djabwurrung country (Black Range), in Victoria, Australia. In 2016 she boarded the Hanjin as part of a traveling artist residency produced by Access Gallery in partnership with the Burrard Arts Foundation and the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver. Crossing the Pacific takes approximately twenty-three days, during which time Raheem was considered “in residence” aboard the vessel, embedded within a system of global sea-borne freight, eavesdropping on the often-intangible logistics industry.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Naomi Pearce <naomi@woodmill.org>

Date: Wed, July 21, 2021 at 14:42

Subject: Re: Stolen Voices

To: <amaarar@gmail.com>

Dear Amaara,

Firstly, my apologies for the delay in getting in touch following Johanna's email. I just got back from London, my first trip since the pandemic began. I had hoped to write from there but found it impossible to focus; so out of practice with being away from home. Secondly, I hope this finds you well and that the last eighteen months have treated you kindly.

In *Stolen Voices*, Rebecca and Johanna describe their investigation as "thinking through a listening process." Over the last couple of months, I've been working in the field on their behalf, interviewing performers, statisticians, and photographers, listening to these expert witnesses speak about their interactions with the coast through the magical/terrifying technology of Zoom. Our conversations have unfolded in spare bedrooms and kitchen tables, marked by the delays of our internet connections and aided by cables strung along the ocean floor. This email is also generated by oceanic communication, but instead of your voice, I hear my fingers tapping the keyboard, a neighbor trimming their hedge, my cat's persistent meows, and the silence where your replies would be.

To make up for this absence, I lie in bed and listen to "Submerged," guided by your soft but firm directions.²⁹ I've been watching documentation of your performances online too. You could say I've been eavesdropping on your practice, been inspired by your relational spirit, how water flows constantly through your writing and movement, at once metaphor, symbol, medium, and collaborator. I have a post-it stuck to my notice

29 Amaara Raheem, "Submerged," *Dancehouse Diary*, 2020, <https://www.dancehousediary.com.au/?p=4611>.

board with your phrase: “deeply at rest but still in motion,” a condition I can only aspire to!³⁰

As Johanna mentioned, we’ve been drawn to your logging and choreographic mapping work and I wondered whether, rather than an interview, you might be interested in reflecting on your project “Twenty-Three Days at Sea” in a textual or diagrammatic form?³¹ If this is something that appeals, I hope the following notes, thoughts, and questions might be useful as a diving-off point. Please feel free to ignore anything that you don’t find interesting or if the current takes you elsewhere, go with it!

I asked Rebecca to order the logbook you made following “Twenty-Three Days at Sea” but sadly it never arrived. We suspect the giant cargo ship called the Ever Given is probably to blame, the one that got stuck in the Suez Canal back in March 2021.³² I didn’t realize twelve percent of global trade goes through this vein of water. There are YouTube videos showing satellite footage of the incident; the Ever Given is wedged comically between narrow clay banks like a pill stuck in an esophagus, while the stomach’s blue gulf fills with impatient vessels. This incident exposed infrastructure’s invisible and nested nature. One ship had global repercussions both financial (apparently the waiting costs caused by the incident were an eye-watering \$9.6bn per day) and logistical. I struggle to comprehend the scale of the maritime industry, of the ships themselves, and the distances they travel. I’m oblivious to their movement and yet dependent on their cargo.

This is why “Twenty-Three Days at Sea” is such an intriguing project. Did you feel as though you were eavesdropping on globalization, and if so, did you hear anything juicy? What did you consider your role on the ship to be? Were you smuggled in

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Amaara Raheem and Kimberly Phillips, *Twenty-Three Days at Sea: A Travelling Artist Residency: Chapter One 2015–2016: The Logbook of Amaara Raheem* (Access Gallery, 2016).

³² “2021 Suez Canal Obstruction,” *Wikipedia*, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=2021_Suez_Canal_obstruction&oldid=1099510371.

to spy or embody something? Or perhaps you were less motivated by the ship itself and more by the physical feeling of being untethered from land, hopeful that floating might produce alternative possibilities for being or thinking?

In absence of the logbooks, I read your wonderful “Floating Propositions” instead.³³ How funny to come across the open call at the moment you were preparing to leave London. Do you think this is how change happens? Like buses, all at once.

I’m fascinated by the shipping container; a symbol of standardization and all the ruthless efficacy and universality this enables. As design historian Craig Martin puts it: “The shipping container models the fundamentals of late capitalism even as it facilitates it: a standardized, reproducible structure that looks and functions the same everywhere.”³⁴ He uses the phrase “cargotecture,” to describe the appropriation of shipping containers into shops, hotels, and pop-up restaurants. I read recently that in the UK shipping containers are now being used to house the homeless. There are forty pods in the city of Reading, off the Abattoirs Road, at the back of the Cattle Market car park. A place where once, I assume, cows were herded for slaughter and sale.

In *Fish Story*, the artist Allan Sekula writes that some ports are “fulcrums of history.”³⁵ What did the ports you witnessed sound like from the sea, could you sense the residue of long-gone travelers, of the routes inherited?

One question I have asked all my interlocutors is about the dynamics of interdisciplinary work, what it affords, and how the coast facilitates these kinds of disciplinary exchanges. You’ve written about being drawn to interdisciplinary work: “in order to know a ‘home’ — or a body of practice — I must migrate.” During the residency, you became cargo, but unlike the objects or materials on board, your destination was the ship itself. If

33 Amaara Raheem, “Speaking Dancer In-Residence,” *NIVEL — Artistic Research in the Performing Arts*, 2019, <https://nivel.teak.fi/adie/speaking-dancer-in-residence/>.

34 Craig Martin, *Shipping Container* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

35 Allan Sekula, *Fish Story* (Richter Verlag, 1995).

making kin or making home is a continuous building project, as you write in *What the water gave me*, how has the pandemic shifted your relationship to home and migration?

In our last team meeting, we talked about the figure of the expert, asking ourselves why we have sought out “experts” on the coast, and what the status of the expert is today. Can we make a case for expertise, for disciplinary rigor, while challenging hierarchies of expertise? The problem being (as I see it) that some experts are deemed more valuable than others, while certain professions are being razed to the ground, bottomed out, unfunded because not all the nuances are fully legible to everyone. What are your thoughts on the figure of the expert, and do you identify as one?

Sorry, this is such a long email! I really enjoyed engaging with your work at a distance.

Looking forward to hearing from you in due course. In terms of timeframe, this is flexible right now, but it would be fantastic to receive your contribution by the end of August 2021 if possible.

Warm wishes,
Naomi

P.S Who are we not listening to?

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Amaara Raheem <amaaarar@gmail.com>

Date: Sun, August 29, 2021 at 23:35

Subject: Re: Stolen Voices

To: Naomi Pearce <naomi@woodmill.org>

Dear Naomi,

I write to you from the central goldfields of western Victoria, in Djabwurrung country, in the Black Range, where I now live, miles away from the ocean. Here, we’ve been in various phases of lockdown for nearly two years and in some ways, being in lockdown is reminiscent of residing in a cargo ship. For me it’s

been a time within time that is mysterious, strange, epic, boring, challenging, and occasionally, surprisingly, exquisite.

Thank you for sharing the process of investigation that Rebecca and Johanna describe as “thinking through a listening process” for it resonates with how I spent time at sea, in residence aboard a cargo ship. But before I get into that I could say that this residency was dreamed into existence by visionary curator Kimberly Phillips, then Director of Access Gallery (Vancouver) and first seeded in my flat in London, in December 2014, whilst packing my things into five cardboard boxes to set sail upon a cargo ship, as I was returning to Australia after fifteen years of living and working in England. One afternoon I took a break from sorting, made a cup of tea, sat on the last remaining chair, and scrolled through Facebook where I stumbled upon an international call out by Access Gallery inviting submissions for its new Travelling Artist Residency Program. The call offered selected artists passage aboard a cargo ship sailing from Vancouver, Canada to Shanghai, China, stating that “crossing the Pacific Ocean takes approximately twenty-three days, during which time the artist would be considered ‘in residence’ aboard the vessel.” I felt an immediate and visceral impulse to respond for it seemed to me that this was not simply an artist-in-residence program but a far more compelling frame, offering a specific set of constraints to reflect and build upon my life and creative practice which was already engaged in a fundamental process of change.

I smiled when I read your quip, “Do you think this is how change happens? Like buses, all at once.” I suppose this is exactly what it felt like. Lots of waiting around and then all at once change arrived, multiplied.

Do you by chance recall “The Boat Project”? A participatory artwork by Lone Twin presented at London’s 2012 Cultural Olympiad in which the public were invited to donate enough wood to build a specially designed racing yacht called, *Collective*

Spirit. Theater scholar and author Fiona Wilkie termed *Collective Spirit*, “the ship as process.”³⁶

A process that focused on the labor involved in building boats and sought to connect this with community, collective action, and imagination. I was particularly drawn to the part of the invitation that stated, “along with the wood [Lone Twin] wanted stories: accounts of what the wooden objects meant to the people donating them.”³⁷ From the first, movement and story were my anchors on board this utterly unique residency.

In my application for “Twenty-Three Days at Sea” I proposed to use my body as a measuring and listening device, to engage in a choreographic study of “continuous motion” and “rise and fall.” I was interested in techniques such as melody, narrative, and rhythmical action. I also wrote that I wanted to consider performance as a “conversation,” not necessarily in dialogue with an audience but in this instance, in dialogue with various parts of myself. I was interested in the relationship between my physical body—with all its particularities, lived history of migration, ways of doing, seeing, and sensing—and the social body, and I understood the “social body” as something more porous, more contingently produced, emerging from embodied encounters with place.

Your question, “Did you feel as though you were eavesdropping on globalization?” is such an intriguing provocation that I wish this question had been posed to me before or during my time aboard the ship. At the time I didn’t term my practice as “eavesdropping” but rather as “listening in and with my whole body.” I turned away from concepts such as “globalization” because here, aboard the Hanjin Geneva I was immersed in a world, and a context that stretched out infinitely beyond my grasp.

The cargo ship was a peculiar place, both contradictory and irregular. It was contradictory insofar as it couldn’t be con-

36 Fiona Wilkie, *Performance, Transport and Mobility: Making Passage* (Palgrave, 2015), 124.

37 Ibid., 125.

tained. The ship was run on strict schedules, and simultaneously refused them. It was the weather that dictated the ship's will. Everything was metal and huge. I couldn't tell where the ship began and ended except when I was on the bridge, nine storeys above the deck, a hundred feet in the air. There, I found a long bench and a pair of binoculars. There, I watched information come in. At night the bridge was the only place kept black, so that officers on watch could see the sea. As I opened the door the light in the stairwell went out, and I had to announce my name to the men on watch in the darkness. Of course, the entire anthology of oceanic imaginaries was present aboard the vessel through passing cruise ships, the endless "empty" space of the open sea, shipwrecks and storms, war and whaling, sinking islands, plastic waste, the anguish of asylum seekers, territorial waters, lighthouse-keeping, thresholds, rites of passage, pirates, sewage, ports and industrial wharves, containers and containerization.

So prodigious and unfamiliar was the situation around me that I held onto what I knew would help make solid ground, my creative practice. However, things took a turn in my practice when I encountered the ship's log: a public, legal record that charted our passage. The ship's log resided in the Wheelhouse — where I had 24-hour access — and was available for me to read, and discuss with the officers on watch. The ship's log was arranged vertically, with columns that recorded Date, Time, Barometer, Temperature, Wind Direction, Swell, Ground Track, Course Steered, Distance Made Good, etc. The more time I spent with it the more I noticed that the log was fragile, handwritten in pencil, information was often erased, updated and I began to understand that "facts" were not necessarily fixed.

The other thing that had a huge effect on my emotional barometer at sea was that the crew sang karaoke every night, in a makeshift karaoke bar. As the crew insisted "only love songs," which drifted down the corridor, through the air ducts and the turbine propellers, into my dreams.

This is in part what prompted me to ask what is not recorded in the ship's log? And how I began a practice of "logging." I

sought to overlay emotional questions on top of navigational concerns which in time, may or may not be answered in performance. In the ship's log I noticed different voices at play but one that was recurrently missing was an emotional or personal voice. I wondered how inserting feelings alongside facts might create a new, perhaps secret, log? For instance, what if I placed a fragment of poetry taken from Sylvia Plath next to distance traveled in nautical miles so it reads

Course steered: 256

We make new stock from the salt.³⁸

I started "smuggling" information out of the ship's log and writing on my cabin windows with whiteboard markers; inserting alternative narratives alongside shipping news and thereby recomposing what a "true" account of my journey might be.

Day: Thursday

Time: 12:00

Barometer: 1001.5

Swell: w'ly 2-3m

Temperature: air: 12

Internal Weather: everything solid slips

Wind Direction: ESE

Spaces to inhabit: the driver's seat

Anatomy to inhabit: collarbones

words overheard: every day is Monday

The figure of the expert is a very interesting one aboard the Hanjin for I was aware that these sailors held my life in their hands. That they were experts at sea, at navigation, at safety and many other things besides. This was especially felt when there were storms, for we sailed in the spring of 2016 and as the Third Officer one especially rough day at sea asked me, "You have this word in English? Typhoon?"

38 Sylvia Plath, "The Applicant," in *Ariel* (Faber and Faber, 1965).

I knew then that I understood nothing of the procedures or protocols at sea that might keep me — or anybody else — safe if the winds played us ill. Of course, I had some safety inductions when I first came on board and knew where the lifeboats were kept. But what real use would that be to me in the face of a real catastrophe?

What I did take great care with was the kettle in my room. I had asked the steward for one, to make myself cups of tea at my own leisure for meal times were very strict and there was no snacking — or drinking tea — between meals. When he handed me the kettle it was with a very serious warning not to start a fire in my cabin as we had twelve shipping containers of fireworks in cargo.

“The Chinese love American fireworks,” he added sternly.

My expertise in these conditions was to set up daily movement tasks and writing practices; to walk along the perimeter of the ship every day, when the weather allowed; to climb ladders and discover spaces between the containers that could be claimed as temporary dance studios; to dance outside when the wind was so strong it offered a resistance like a wall; to lean into the wind’s density at such an angle that I became airborne.

Hierarchy was certainly very present on the ship. The Hanjin was owned by a German company called NSB and we sailed the territorial seas under the German flag, always hoisted when we came into port. On this ship the officers were all German except the Chief Mate who was Polish and all the crew were Filipinos. There were three main languages spoken on board. The crew spoke Filipino, the officers spoke German, and the working language aboard the freighter was English. But even when the stevedores were speaking English there was a whole lexicon — the ship’s language — that I didn’t comprehend. I became fascinated with the language of coordinates, weather reports, logistics of the port as well as the stories told to me at various times of day and night as I sat with the officers on watch. I was an anomaly, a Sri Lankan born Australian artist who, as I have done for most of my life, slipped between East and West, North and South,

the color of my skin appearing and/or dissolving as necessary. For example, I did not argue with the Chief Mate when he told me Europe was a “higher civilization,” I just listened because I was aware that as an artist aboard a cargo ship, I was already in a position of power and privilege. I tried to remember that my watching, sensing, and listening aboard this vessel was partial. That I would never see the bigger picture although I was always feeling for it.

There is much more to say but perhaps for now, I will pause there.

Thank you for the invitation to contribute to “Necessary Note.” It’s been such a pleasure to revisit this oceanic passage, especially in this time of lockdown where I have spent a lot of time landlocked, in the mountains.

Warm wishes,
Amaara

Ps: The Chief Mate also asked me many questions about my artistic work and was the only person on board to do so. He also made me very good coffee every morning when I joined him on watch and gifted me a pair of bright red nsb overalls, which I have used in performance ever since.

EPILOGUE

There is a row of pretty cottages in a protected cove in a small fishing village on the Moray Coast in Scotland. Two detectives are convalescing here. They wake up early every morning to swim in the gently lapping, silver water. The water is cold but after the initial shock, the intense sensation is welcome. It is summer and while the temperature can rarely be called hot, there is warmth from the sun most days. The detectives swim the length of the cove and float on their backs, ignoring the possibility of jellyfish. Memories of other waters press on the edges of their minds.

During the day, both detectives keep silent except to greet a neighbor or a dog. They each have their little tasks. One walks up and down the stairs, placing each foot with minute care from heel to toe in continuous, silent movement. The other runs her finger along the baseboards, producing a tiny squeak in the key of G. One sits on the ledge outside with legs swinging a few centimeters above the water, while the other lies down on the sofa and lets an off-kilter spring press on a tight muscle in her back. One counts their own heartbeats. One breathes in and out with exact symmetry. One sticks their fingers under their tongue and tries to whistle. One worries at a little rip in the sofa cushion until cotton-wool stuffing starts to peek out. One sleeps for an hour, from 2:15–3:15p.m., every day. One has a recurring dream

about the lintel above the window on the first floor. They keep themselves occupied. As night draws in, the two might share a gin and then their jaws might soften and they might begin to speak. There are things the detectives can't quite put names to. Once, some time ago, there were more detectives. (Where are they?) When they try to tell the story of their last case, it comes out only as a list of details, some clearly related, others seemingly disconnected. Olives and licorice, ice cream and wool.

The cottage where they stay has a mild smell of damp and well-used carpets. The walls are a faded baby blue, and there are little collections of seashells on windowsills. A pile of old board games with important pieces missing leans precariously in a corner of the lounge. The kitchen has a pan, a pot, a few chipped plates and mugs, and some dull knives. There is a mysterious stain on the kitchen ceiling and grime in between the tiles in the shower that is impossible to scrub off. On the bookshelf in the hallway, between the glossy covers of an Ian Rankin novel and an Ann Cleeves, there is a wad of folded paper. One of the detectives finds it and unfolds the assembled sheets. Each page has printed on it a single word in large font. TRIANGLE, reads one page. GRID. SPIRAL. HOLE. She stares at these pages, and then folds them again, and puts them back where she found them. She walks to the harbor in the center of the village, picking up every third pebble she sees. It takes some time. She stands at the end of the dock and looks at the pile of pebbles in her hands, and feels their weight and the alternately rough and smooth textures against her skin. Then, she throws the pebbles, one by one, into the water. Splish, splash.

The other detective finds these papers, later that day. They unfold the sheets, look at the text and then refold and replace. They, too, walk to the harbor, where a pod of dolphins is now leaping. As they walk, they try to empty themselves of will and intention, and fail, but with a certain result. They stand on the water's edge, and glance at the little pebbles scattered here and there, which seem to indicate some prior, but now unknowable, event. They roll their shoulders and neck with a few satisfying pops. They crack their knuckles. Then, for exactly twenty-five

minutes, they perform a series of clicks and whistles, an opera for dolphins they have just composed. The dolphins keep swimming.

Neither detective mentions the papers to the other.

There is a lonely red telephone box at the north end of the village, near the detectives' cottage. Its paint is tidy and well maintained. There is a glossy photograph of it placed prominently behind the bar in the village pub, with an indecipherable signature scrawled in black marker. One morning, the phone rings. Not the steady ring of most telephones, but an irregular pattern of short and long rings with intermittent silences between. The detectives, sitting at the kitchen table, do not leave the cottage to answer the phone. They look at each other. In one motion, they go to the bookshelf, remove the folded papers and divide them. They return to the table to transcribe on the blank back sides of the pages. They write all morning.

At midday, the telephone stops ringing. The detectives stop writing. They look at what they've done. They look at all of the pages together.

They are looking at a score.

Graphical, composed of lines, points, triangles, grids, spirals, holes. Textual, with instructions for an event of investigation. Documenting action taken and setting up the conditions for something else to happen. Evidencing a structure and structuring an event. Not arbitrary and not fixed. Not data. Not an algorithm. Not nothing.

A score for coast.

A score for tones. A score for notes.

A score for this necessary note.

They open their throats.

And they sing.

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